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EXCLUSIVE WRESTLEMANIA 27 TEAM COVERAGE!

PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED

+ OUR ANNUAL STATE OF THE GAME REPORT

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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

1. Airplane spin
2. Arm drag
3. Arm lock
4. Asian spike
5. Atomic drop
6. Bear hug
7. Bite
8. Body slam
9. Body tackle
10. Bulldog
11. Chicken wing
12. Choke slam
13. Claw
14. Clothesline
15. Cross body block
16. Double axehandle
17. Drop kick
18. Eagle split
19. Elbow smash
20. Eye gouge
21. Face rake
22. Fireman's carry ram
23. Flying body press
24. Flying clothesline
25. Flying drop kick
26. Flying elbow drop
27. Flying head butt
28. Flying mare
29. Forearm smash
30. Foreign object
31. Full nelson
32. Giant swing
33. Grapevine
34. Hair pull
35. Hammer lock
36. Head lock
37. Head stomp
38. Hip roll
39. Irish whip
40. Knee drop
41. Leg lock
42. Leg sweep
43. Manager interference
44. Monkey flip
45. Overhead toss
46. Pole ram
47. Reverse chin lock
48. Rolling scissors
49. Rope burn
50. Russian sickle
51. Savate kick
52. Scissors grip
53. Shoulder breaker
54. Slingshot
55. Snap mare
56. Step-over toe hold
57. Suplex
58. Surfboard
59. Turnbuckle smash
60. Wrist lock

SET-UP HOLDS

61. Abdominal stretch
62. Avalanche
63. Backbreaker
64. Backroll press
65. Belly to belly
66. Big splash
67. Boston crab
68. Brain buster
69. Camel clutch
70. Cobra clutch
71. Cradle
72. Crucifix
73. DDT
74. Figure four
75. Flying leg drop
76. Gourd buster
77. Hurricanrana
78. Moonsault
79. Neckbreaker
80. Piledriver
81. Power bomb
82. Power slam
83. Scorpion deathlock
84. Sleeper
85. Slingshot suplex
86. Spine buster
87. Stunner
88. Sunset flip
89. Superplex
90. Texas cloverleaf

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: *Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: *Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.*

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: *Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.*

FROM THE DESK OF...

IT MUST HAVE been very special for Triple-H to stand in the Philips Arena ring for the opening of *Monday Night Raw* and absorb what the fans were offering: respect. What he and The Undertaker accomplished 1.6 miles away at the Georgia Dome the previous night at WrestleMania 27 was far beyond what anyone had expected. Prior to the match, in fact, I commented to a colleague that I didn't envy Triple-H having to follow Shawn Michaels' two years as Undertaker's WrestleMania opponent. HBK-UT at WM was Match of the Year for 2009 and 2010. This match, I assumed, had nowhere to go but down.

Well, we all know now how wrong I (and most everyone else) was. If UT-HHH is not voted Match of the Year for 2011, I can't wait to see the match that is.

Of course, as Chris "Fred Astaire" Jericho can testify, it takes two to tango. Undertaker was brilliant at WrestleMania. But that was to be expected. On the other hand, nobody really knew what to expect from Triple-H, particularly in light of the fact that he had spent most of the year sidelined with a biceps tear. The irony of the end result—a surrender by Triple-H—stood in stark contrast to the fact that the man had put forth the most courageous performance of his career, and, in fact, was every bit as great as The Undertaker on this night.

What he experienced in the ring 24 hours later was probably more gratifying than having his hand raised in victory. Some of the same fans who for years chided him for receiving preferential treatment from Vince McMahon because he was the boss' favorite (only) son-in-law finally got to see him for what he really was: a man with talent, spirit, and H-H-H (heart, heart, and more heart). Maybe, just maybe, the ovation the Georgia fans gave him was an offer of an olive branch to a man who has given everything he's had to this sport for nearly 20 years and never once complained about those who, since 2003 (the year he married the boss' daughter), suddenly came to the conclusion that he was overrated. Indeed, had Triple-H not displayed such a lapse of judgment as marrying the woman he fell in love with, his standing in many fans' eyes surely would have been better.

We as fans and observers of this sport are being hit with the cold, hard fact that we are gradually losing the human resources that have breathed life into this business for the past couple of decades. It was Shawn Michaels who retired last year and Edge this year. Undertaker, I believe, will call it quits after going for his 20th consecutive WrestleMania victory on April 1, 2012. And Triple-H, with Dad-in-Law eligible for Social Security and front office responsibilities mounting, will not be around much longer after that.

Triple-H knows full well the urgency of finding athletes to fill the void he and his fellow legends are creating. That's why he recently announced that he was personally taking control of WWE's talent development department. It will be interesting to see how the company recruits and molds talent on his watch. It's a fairly safe assumption that he is not satisfied with the status quo—or he would have seen no reason to create the position for himself.

If, somehow, he can find a future Triple-H and can one day join the crowd in offering him a standing ovation for a match and career well done, the second phase of Hunter Hearst Helmsley's career will be just as successful as the first.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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(1919-2002)

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Matt Roberts

COVER DESIGN:
Sam Weyant

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LOOK FOR THE SEPTEMBER 2011 ISSUE OF *PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED*, ON SALE JULY 5, 2011

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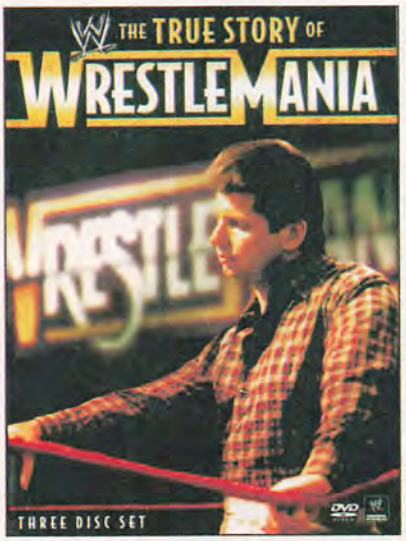
BEFORE THE BELL

COMPILED BY MIKE BESSLER

THE TRUE STORY OF WRESTLEMANIA

WrestleMania is a cultural institution. It's the realization of the American dream in which one man's passion, creativity, and determination ultimately redefined the very fabric of American pop culture. After nearly three decades of star-studded, pulse-pounding action, WrestleMania is now a global sensation, and Vince McMahon—the architect of this grand event—is nothing less than an icon. *The True Story Of WrestleMania* seeks to definitively capture the essence of this success story, providing an in-depth look at the evolution of this annual extravaganza.



The True Story Of WrestleMania is a three-disc DVD set that includes a full-length documentary and nearly eight hours of 'Mania's greatest matches. The documentary is the linchpin of the collection, featuring behind-the-scenes footage and candid recollections from WWE staff and in-ring performers, including WWE Senior Adviser Basil DeVito, WWE Director Kerwin Silfies, Hulk Hogan, Chris Jericho, Triple-H, and many others.

Longtime readers of PRO WRESTING ILLUSTRATED will likely recognize Publisher Stu Saks among the host of insiders and experts who provide valuable insight and commentary to the narrative.

By and large, *The True Story Of WrestleMania* presents an overwhelmingly positive account of WrestleMania through the years. From Vince McMahon's emotional reminiscences of the first WrestleMania to previously unreleased footage of the setup and rehearsal for WrestleMania IX, the documentary is warmly nostalgic and surprisingly detailed. Paying homage to those who established WrestleMania as an enduring and relevant phenomenon, *The True Story Of WrestleMania* appropriately acknowledges the exceptional contributions of four pillars of WrestleMania: Hulk Hogan, Steve Austin, Shawn Michaels, and The Undertaker.

It's not all roses, though, as McMahon and WWE staff readily acknowledge some of their less-than-successful endeavors, including the logistical difficulties behind WrestleMania 2, a regrettably xenophobic angle involving the "traitor" Sgt. Slaughter for WrestleMania VII, and the poor booking decisions that led to a disappointing main event between Hulk Hogan and Psycho Sid at WrestleMania VIII.

The True Story Of WrestleMania celebrates the event as a gathering point for athleticism and entertainment. WWE unabashedly—and perhaps understandably—touts its achievements with confidence and pride.

Purists will lament the omission of certain events from WrestleMania's official canon. Predictably, the documentary's coverage of WrestleMania XX effectively omits Chris Benoit's memorable victory in the evening's main event. Additionally, Ric Flair's "retirement match" from WrestleMania XXIV garners no mention despite the fact that the match offered one of the most emotional climaxes in the history of WrestleMania. It's WWE's story to tell, though, and the company clearly does not hesitate in exercising creative license and editorial discretion when presenting its own history.

Above all, *The True Story Of WrestleMania* is a time capsule of great memories, exciting action, comedic interludes, and high drama. For exceptional production and a selection of content that is both intriguing and tremendously entertaining, we give *The True Story Of WrestleMania* 4½ out of five suplexes.

TALKIN' TRASH

10. Sting re-signs with TNA, reportedly turning down a dream match with The Undertaker at WrestleMania and passing on a spot in the WWE Hall of Fame. We tried to contact Sting's business adviser for comment, but we were told that he gets poor telephone reception inside of his padded cell.

9. Eddie Edwards defeats Roderick Strong to win the Ring of Honor heavyweight championship. Now a triple-crown winner for ROH, Edwards is one of the brightest stars of wrestling's independent scene.

8. The personal problems of Jeff Hardy and Kurt Angle spill into the public eye once again, raising questions regarding the morale and professional atmosphere of the TNA locker room. When it happens once, it's a wake-up call. When it happens over and over again, it's a trend … and a disturbing trend, at that.

7. WWE's *Tough Enough* reality series returns to television, hosted by "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin. Austin's training regimen might well be the only form of higher education in which cursing, drinking beer, and fighting in class actually guarantee higher marks.

6. *The Jersey Shore's* Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi considers a career in wrestling following a series of guest appearances at WWE events. In a perfect world, WWE would consider a talent exchange with MTV and send Santino Marella and Vladimir Kozlov to *The Jersey Shore* for some entertainment gold.

Photo by George Napolitano

5. Jerry Lawler finally has his "WrestleMania moment," scoring a moral victory against Michael Cole. While it was great to watch "The King" take center stage at the "Showcase Of The Immortals," seeing Cole receive his much-deserved comeuppance was a terrific bonus.

4. Undertaker and Triple-H steal the show at WrestleMania 27. This titanic clash of seasoned ring veterans reminded fans that classic storytelling and solid wrestling action still form the foundation of present-day wrestling.

3. The Miz defeats John Cena to retain the WWE championship. Send all congratulations and accolades to Alex Riley, care of Miz' coattails.

2. Randy Orton and CM Punk trade barbs with Kurt Angle via Twitter. The mere idea that professional wrestlers would actually consider settling their disputes inside of a wrestling ring—and not on the Internet—is *sooo* last decade.

1. The Rock returns to WWE, promising a main-event match with John Cena at WrestleMania 28. Sure, we can all smell what the Rock is cookin'—let's just hope it's still fresh one whole year from now.

WE HEARD THAT!

"There are so many variables. Let's just say that I turned it down for the same reasons I always have. Something in me never trusted what would happen up there, based entirely on the track record with other WCW guys and everything that went on after Vince bought WCW."

—Sting, discussing his reasons for turning down a run with WWE to *Fighting Talk*

"My parents taught me if there is something you want, there is always a way to obtain it. I am a woman of challenges and I formulate plans to obtain [what I want]. I was not scared, either. I do not know if it was my youth or the emotion to take on a new adventure. I thought of it as an opportunity to achieve my dream and did not give into fear."

—TNA's Sarita on her early foray in to the wrestling world in an interview with *Milenio Online*

"CM Punk will tell you every 30 seconds he's from Chicago, and it gets a little annoying. Rey Mysterio, in that same vein, will tell you every 30 seconds he's from San Diego. I guess I didn't make the same connection. I hope I've got some people I went to high school with or maybe some people who didn't think I'd get as far as I did enjoying and watching."

—Cody Rhodes, explaining the challenges of taking on fan favorite Rey Mysterio Jr., from his interview with *Creative Loafing Atlanta*.

"Wrestling is such an awesome thing in that you'll never be able to achieve all that you want to and there's always things you can improve on. That's why it's such a great career."

—East Coast independent wrestler Adam Cole on *The 7x Wrestling Show,* discussing his motivation as an up-and-coming performer

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

"A newspaper reporter is a know-it-all with deep insecurities and a pen."

—Jeff Hardy, quoting Edgar Allan Poe via his official Twitter page. (The precise context of the tweet is unclear.)

ONE TO WATCH: KEKOA THE FLYIN' HAWAIIAN

Ku, the traditional Hawaiian god of war, should be very proud, indeed. Every time Kekoa the Flyin' Hawaiian, native son of Manoa, Oahu, steps into the ring, he proudly carries the spirit and strength of his Pacific Islander ancestry. Combining athletic skill with exceptional confidence and charisma, Kekoa draws upon his personal work ethic and his cultural heritage in his efforts to establish himself as a potential force in the world of professional wrestling.

Photo by Hank Stoklosa

Over the course of his four-year career, Kekoa has enjoyed an impressive ascent to the top of the card in independent wrestling organizations throughout the eastern United States. At present, he holds the heavyweight championship titles for three different organizations: Lehigh Valley Wrestling, Liberty Wrestling Organization, and Pennsylvania All-Star Wrestling.

Although the Flyin' Hawaiian's moniker suggests a style replete with high spots and risky maneuvers, his grappling style is multifaceted. "I can get very technical," he says, citing legend Ricky Steamboat as a primary influence for his in-ring technique.

Kekoa takes care to build the anticipation of his growing fan base with each performance. "I keep the audience satisfied, but I don't give them everything in a single match," he said. "That way, when they come back, I can always show them something new."

Kekoa's determination is rooted in a strong moral code that includes abstinence from tobacco, drugs, and alcohol. "I'm straight-edge," he explains, noting that his lifestyle enhances his physical fitness and mental awareness. "It helps my conditioning and it does give me some advantage, especially when I'm going against guys who aren't as fit or as focused as I am."

Although he's in demand on the independent wrestling scene, Kekoa also finds time for a number of other projects, including his role in a wrestling-themed, Web-based reality series called *The Mat Frat*, as well as occasional performances as a stand-up comedian. He also makes appearances as a motivational speaker, sharing his personal experiences and insight with young people.

Despite his diverse range of interests and projects, Kekoa considers wrestling his top priority. In May 2010, he scored a small role for an episode of *Monday Night Raw* in which he appeared as a jiu-jitsu trainer for Maryse. The spot was one of the highlights of his burgeoning career, and Kekoa assuredly hopes to return to action with WWE or another major promotion as soon as possible. "I definitely want wrestling to be my career," he said. "I want to wake up every day, go to a new town, and continue to do what I love."

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Renowned for his high-flying, hard-hitting repertoire, the prodigious AJ Styles maintains the pace of his brilliant career through a consistent willingness to venture into new and unfamiliar territory. Such is the case with regard to Styles' recent foray into the world of music videos. Recently, Styles found himself cast opposite country music siren Sarah Darling in the video for "Something To Do With Your Hands," the first release from Darling's newest album, *Angels & Devils*.

"My agent and I had just started to send some feelers out a few weeks before the shoot when Sarah's people called and got us on board," he explained. For Styles, the opportunity to diversify his résumé beyond the realm of the squared-circle held tremendous appeal. "The more experience you get, the better off you can be. You can't do the kinds of things that I do in the ring and expect to wrestle forever," Styles explained.

In his role as a burly and blissfully oblivious handyman—aptly named "Mr. Handy"—Styles plays the part of an unwitting object of affection for the lovelorn Darling. By the end of the video, Darling finds all of her home-repair wishes fulfilled and she finally wins the attention of her wrench-slinging eye-candy, Mr. Handy. This unapologetically campy tale struck a resounding chord with country fans in grand fashion, as the video for "Something To Do With Your Hands" quickly became one of the most watched videos on CMT's website within mere days of its release. Noting Darling's exceptional talent as a performer, Styles is keen to suggest that some of the video's success might well be attributed to the crossover appeal brought about by his part in the project. "Country music and wrestling tend to go hand in hand," he mused.

In addition to the warm reception extended by country music enthusiasts, Styles found support for his fledgling acting career among his peers in the TNA locker room. "Nobody razzed me too much," he laughed. "But every so often, one of the guys will kind of look at me and say, 'Mr. Handy, huh?' The funny thing about it is that I'm not really that handy in real life."

Don't look for Styles to follow in the footsteps of fellow TNA performer and country crooner Mickie James, though. "Singing? That's a big no for me," he says. Indeed, with opportunities abounding and a trademark never-say-die attitude, "The Phenomenal One" can still well afford to call his own spots.

JUNE'S BEST

Jarrett: "First, I took his wife. Now, I'm gonna take his gimmick."
—Denise Carter @xplornet.com

Through gritted teeth, Murphy asks Jarrett if he has any last words.
—Tbeardjr005@gmail.com

Jarrett: "I think I can ... I think I can ... I think I can ..."
—Eric Dodge, Glendale, AZ

Gunner and Murphy: "What are *we* so angry about?"
—Linda Gayle, Seattle, WA

Back on the stool, Jarrett! You're going to need all the rest you can get!
—John Frees, Buffalo, NY

CAPTION ME!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI?* Here's your chance to prove it, punk! This shot of Samoa Joe confronting D'Angelo Dinero on *Impact* deserves a concise, and downright uproarious caption. If you think you are up to the challenge, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!," Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch—and the funnier the better!

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

RINGSIDE

BY BILL MELTZER

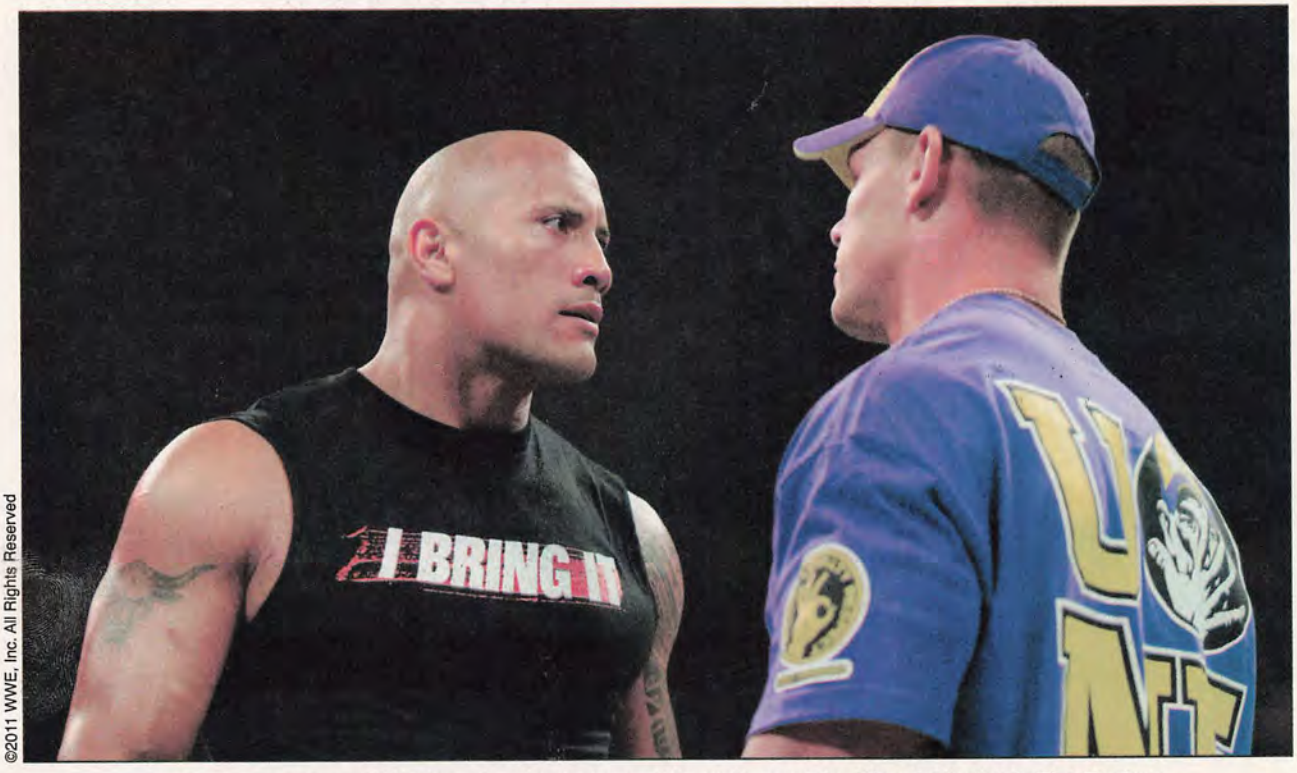
IN THE WAKE OF what some considered to be a lackluster WrestleMania 27 in front of an announced crowd of 71,617 at the Georgia Dome, WWE wasted no time revealing that the main event of WrestleMania 28 will pit **John Cena** against **Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson** in a match that has been rumored for several years.

This marks the first time that WWE—which will now be known simply by its acronym and has dropped the name World Wrestling Entertainment—has announced the headline match of its biggest pay-per-view event so far in advance. Next year's installment of WrestleMania will take place on April 1, 2012, at Sun Life Stadium in Miami.

Although both **Triple-H** and **The Undertaker** rehabbed their respective injuries well enough to stage a potential Match of the Year at 'Mania, don't expect either veteran performer to make many appearances over the next year. 'Taker, who was stretchered out with injuries suffered in the course of running his undefeated streak at WrestleMania to 19-0, may take off the full year to prepare for next year's match due to instability in his rotator cuff and chronic back and knee problems. Triple-H, meanwhile, plans to concentrate on his behind-the-scenes responsibilities, which includes heading a re-organized scouting and development program.

The appearance of pint-sized *Jersey Shore* cast member **Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi** in a mixed tag team match at WrestleMania 27 drew the widespread mainstream publicity that **Vince McMahon** was hoping to get from her inclusion in a bout teaming with **Trish Stratus** and **John Morrison** against **Team LayCool** and **Dolph Ziggler**. However, Polizzi's involvement did not necessarily go over well within the WWE locker room.

First and foremost, the hefty payday she reportedly received drew fire among mid-card performers angered that their own pay from the biggest show of the year would be lower. Secondly, some were upset that the non-



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In a rare occurrence, WWE has already announced its main event for WrestleMania 28: The Rock vs. John Cena. It should be interesting to see what WWE does with a year-long period to promote this dream match.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

The Victory Road clunker between Jeff Hardy and Sting has set both men on different paths: Sting remains the TNA World champion while Hardy's future with the company remains uncertain.

wrestler scored a clean pinfall on former WWE Divas champion **Michelle McCool**. Nevertheless, footage of the former cheerleader doing a handspring elbow and a cartwheel splash to pin McCool drew more mainstream Internet and television coverage than any other aspect of the show, including The Rock's involvement in the main event between Cena and WWE champion **The Miz**.

TNA has been mum on the short-term future of **Jeff Hardy** in the company. Hardy's disastrous TNA match against World champion **Sting** at Victory Road (which ended with Hardy being pinned within 20 seconds of finally locking up) caused public relations headaches for the company and rampant speculation about Hardy's fitness to wrestle that night.

In an attempt to make restitution with disgruntled fans that purchased the $35 pay-per-view event, the company offered six months of free access to tnaondemand.com. Hardy, who is still dealing with both legal and personal problems, was removed indefinitely from TNA house shows and *Impact* tapings the day after Victory Road. He was also booted out of the Immortal faction by **Hulk Hogan** and **Eric Bischoff**. Upon his return, Hardy is likely to try to re-establish himself as a fan favorite.

Meanwhile, the recent bizarre out-of-the-ring behavior of **Kurt Angle** has also raised eyebrows. The former Olympic gold medalist and 14-time world champion was arrested in North Dakota for being behind the wheel of a car while intoxicated, although he was not charged with driving under the influence, according to Highway Patrol **Capt. Kevin Robson**. Angle later posted his side of the story on Twitter, claiming that he was not intoxicated nor passed out behind the wheel, but had called police himself after his car slid off the road onto the median during an ice storm. Shortly thereafter, Angle allegedly posted a series on rants on Twitter throughout WrestleMania Sunday complaining that various WWE performers were stealing his signature moves, taking particular umbrage at **Jack Swagger's** use of the anklelock. Subsequently, Angle claimed that his account had been hacked and someone else had posted in his name.

Various WWE performers wasted little time taking jabs at Angle on Twitter in the weeks that followed. Most notably, **Randy Orton** wrote, "Everything's been done before as far as 'moves' go in sports-entertainment. Instead of taking offense to someone using your move, consider it a sign of respect." The ever-outspoken **CM Punk** was more acerbic, writing, "My Twitter account was hacked is the new: 'I'm a sloppy drunk [expletive].'"

With WWE's full-scale acceleration of its plan to further distance its sports-entertainment product from pro wrestling, what will that mean for **Daniel Bryan** in particular? Even his hold on a mid-card role seems increasingly tenuous. His advertised U.S. title bout against **Sheamus** at WrestleMania 27 was turned into a dark match and the match it-

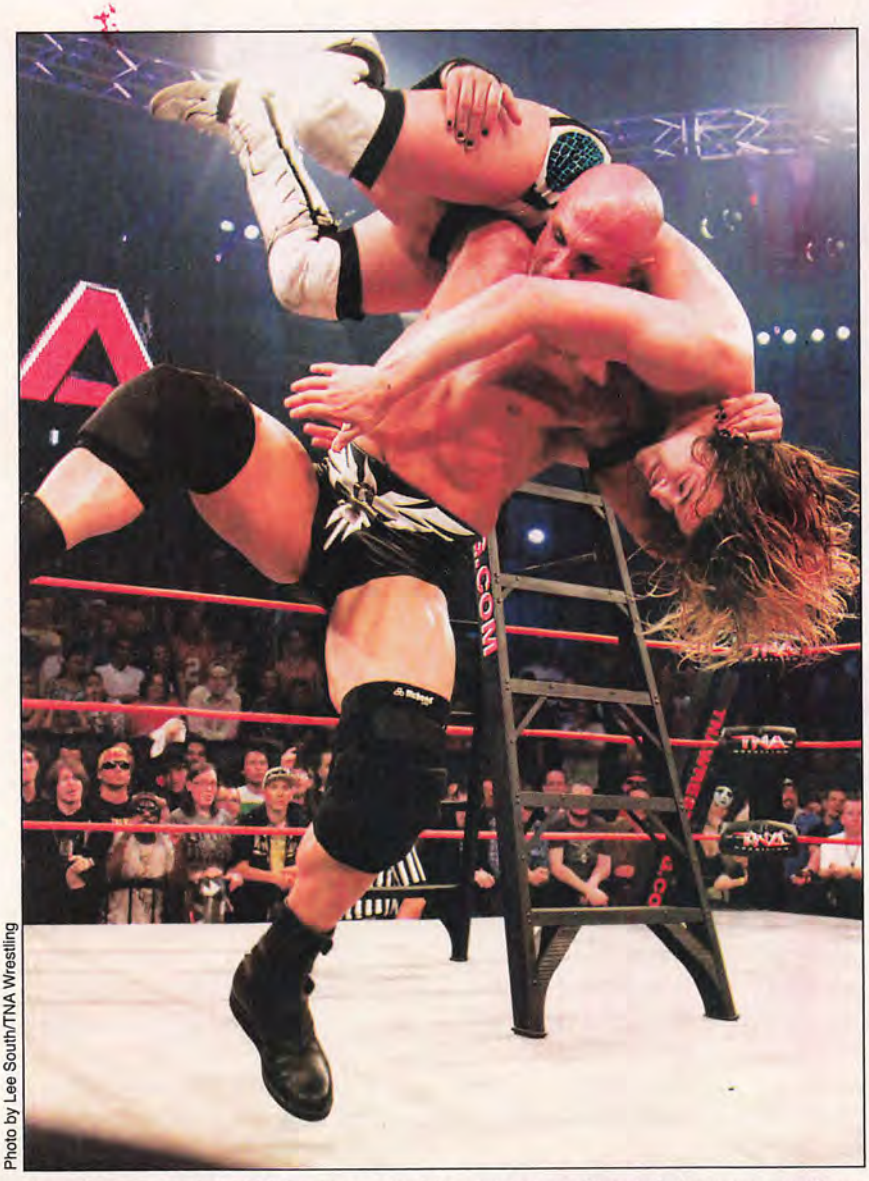

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Christopher Daniels' TNA return caught many fans off-guard. However, perhaps nobody was more surprised than his fellow TNA wrestlers, many of whom had no idea his return was imminent.

self quickly morphed from a one-on-one match into a battle royal with the title on the line. The next night on *Raw*, Bryan lost cleanly to Sheamus.

The return of **Christopher Daniels** to TNA caught many off-guard, as he had split with the company on less-than-friendly terms. However, the relationship was patched up behind the scenes, and when the opportunity arose for Daniels to come to the aid of longtime friend (and sometimes arch-rival) **AJ Styles** in his feud with **Ric Flair**, **Abyss**, **Matt Hardy**, and **Bully Ray**, he was back on *Impact*. Although there had been occasional whispers that "The Fallen Angel" might come back to TNA in the future, news of his sudden return legitimately surprised some people.

It's no secret that WWE has long coveted a larger market share among Latino fans, and has taken significant steps in the past few years to woo more Mexican and Mexican-American fans away from the lucha libre promotions. With the career of **Rey Mysterio Jr.** seemingly winding down—although he denies rumors of seeking his WWE release or considering retirement in the near future—expect WWE to make prominent use of **Sin Cara** and **Alberto Del Rio**. In bringing the former **Mistico** into WWE and pushing him as a top star—albeit with the obligatory name change–WWE broke from its standard policy of having stars from "lesser" promotions serve an apprenticeship in the developmental system.

Scott Hall was recently hospitalized in Orlando. Immediately, rumors surfaced that the veteran wrestler's self-confessed longtime struggle with substance abuse had caused his hospitalization. Hall's publicist, **Geena Jinev Anac** of Lightning Entertainment, put out a press release stating that her client was actually hospitalized for extremely low blood pressure as a result of the after-effects from a bout of pneumonia last summer. His blood pressure medication has been changed.

The wrestling world is mourning the death of **Sir Oliver Humperdink** at age 62 after succumbing to bladder cancer. As the illness took its course, coupled with heart disease and pneumonia, he spent the final weeks of his life in hospice care. Our sincere condolences go out to his family and friends.

Best known for his long red hair and wild beard, and frequently compared to the late **Capt. Lou Albano**, Humperdink was one of the most hated heel managers in several NWA territories during the 1970s and 1980s. He had several successful runs managing in Florida and then branched out to the Mid-Atlantic, Mid-South, West Texas, and Kansas City. Sometimes he managed just a single charge, but more commonly he formed a heel stable known as the House of Humperdink. Most famously, Humperdink and his wrestlers feuded in the Mid-Atlantic and Georgia with **Roddy Piper**, who formed a fan favorite alliance known as Piper's Palace to combat the Humperdink faction.

The list of wrestlers Humperdink managed through the years reads like a who's who of NWA heels of the '70s to mid-1980s. Among his most famous protégés were **Abdullah the Butcher**, **The Assassins**, **Bruiser Brody**, **Killer Brooks**, a version of **The Fabulous Freebirds**, **Terry Funk**, **Superstar Billy Graham**, **Ivan Koloff**, **Don "Magnificent" Muraco**, **Paul Orndorff**, **"Cowboy" Bob Orton**, and **Greg "The Hammer" Valentine**.

Humperdink was voted Manager of the Year in 1980 when he temporarily abandoned his rulebreaking ways. In 1987-88, Humperdink managed fan favorite **Bam Bam Bigelow** in WWE (then WWF). He rounded out his big-promotion career in WCW with three separate runs until retiring in 1992.

Born **John Sutton**, Humperdink was raised in Minnesota and returned to his home state after his retirement from wrestling. As a 15-year-old, he got his start in the wrestling business in **Verne Gagne's** Minneapolis-based AWA. He worked as a ticket-taker and usher, carried wrestlers' robes and ring jackets to the back, and later learned how to set up and transport the ring before and after shows while performing either bell-ringing or ringside security jobs during the events.

It was not until 1973 that a 24-year-old-year Sutton finally got to realize his dream of directly becoming part of the show, when former AWA wrestler **Paul "Butcher" Vachon** invited him to join his new Quebec-based promotion Grand Prix Wrestling. Dubbing himself Sir Oliver Humperdink to suggest haughty English aristocracy to the French-speaking fans, the redhead became the manager of his first charges, **The Hollywood Blonds** tag team of **Jerry Brown** and future Fabulous Freebirds member **Buddy Roberts**. □

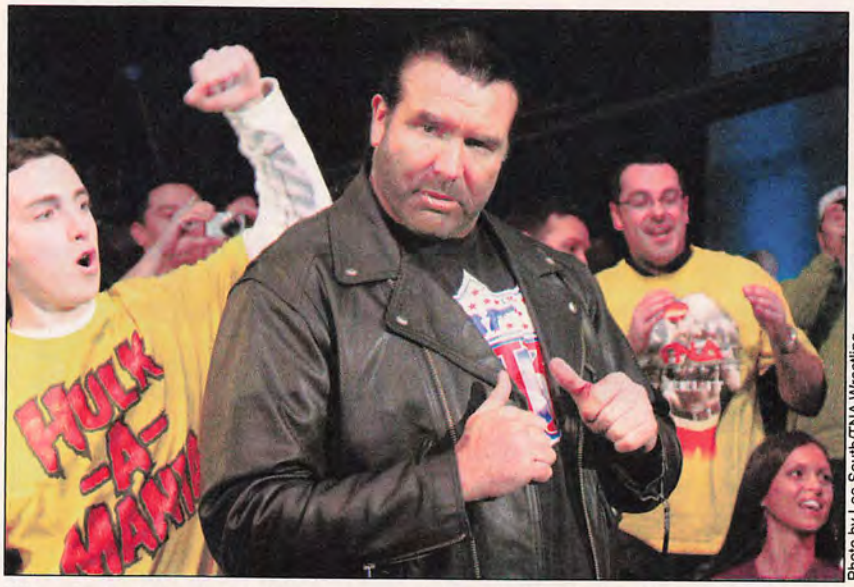

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

When Scott Hall was admitted to a hospital in Florida, it was widely assumed that it was for substance abuse issues. However, Hall's P.R. rep quickly issued a press statement saying Hall's trip to the hospital was for low blood pressure.

Superstar Billy Graham was just one of the many wrestlers Sir Oliver Humperdink lead to championship gold. Humperdink passed away at age 62 in late-March.

QUICK COUNT

BY AL CASTLE

FOR WRESTLING FANS cooped up inside their homes watching wrestling DVDs all winter, Memorial Day, the unofficial beginning of summer, brings with it the welcome opportunity to head outside and get some fresh air. *Now, if I could only figure out how to hook up my TV and DVD player in the backyard.*

While I try to figure that one out, please enjoy this Memorial Day-themed edition of "Quick Counts," and be sure to use plenty of sunscreen.

HOT DOGS

There was a time when The Great Muta was looked at as super-human for his ability to do a top-rope moonsault.

More than two decades later, purveyors of high-risk maneuvers are in less demand than ever before. Because of the inefficient use of gifted aerialists—including TNA's squandered X division—it's harder than ever to get a reaction from a crowd by merely jumping off the top rope ... or off a ladder placed on top of a cage and onto a table.

In some ways, this shift is a good thing. While some daredevils keep trying harder and harder to one-up themselves through overtly dangerous stunts, many fans have come to rediscover the fundamentals that make for a truly great wrestling match—compelling characters, well-told stories, and high drama.

Then WWE went and hired Sin Cara.

POOL PARTY

It's something of a shame that pro wrestling's distinction as "entertainment" rather than pure sport keeps most fans from betting on it.

Now, I'm no advocate for gambling. But some amount of wagering can be a healthy part of any sporting event—especially for the people who beat the odds and win.

And the fact is that, regardless of how the outcomes of wrestling matches are arrived at, it would take tremendous skill to accurately predict the results of a typical eight-match wrestling card, especially when so many wrestling bookers pride themselves on delivering the unexpected.

And so, I encourage you to start a "pool" at your next pay-per-view party—say $1 per match prediction. Who knows? The party host might even make enough to cover the cost of the show.

GRILLING

Good wrestling journalism can be hard to come by.

As with all sportswriters, most who cover wrestling do so in part because they are also fans of wrestling. That, in and of itself, may not sound like a problem, but it can quickly become one when it comes time for reporters to ask the tough questions.

Understandably, many wrestlers and wrestling promoters are none too keen on discussing sensitive topics, including personnel issues and legal controversies. And although a good journalist should never be discouraged from doing his or her job, the fact is that wrestling companies can wield a lot of power. They decide what kind of access you get to their talent, and to their events.

That's enough to turn some reporters from pit bulls into lapdogs. But the wrestling journalists who stand the test of time know that they owe it to their readers, and to the sport itself, to keep digging until they get some answers.

Did I mention *PWI* has been around for 32 years?

COLD BEER

Who would have thought that a couple of brash, beer-swilling loudmouths like Robert Roode and James Storm would make for

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Just when wrestling fans showed they could be entertained by something other than death-defying aerial maneuvers, notes Al Castle, WWE signs Sin Cara, who has made his career by performing high-risk moves around the globe.

such popular babyfaces? Anyone who ever saw Steve Austin, that's who.

Well, before they officially turned over a new leaf in January and embraced the fans' cheers, Beer Money Inc. showed all the signs of a duo with the potential to transcend the tag team division and become one of the most popular acts in all of TNA.

Roode has been a gifted talker and solid competitor in the ring since joining TNA seven years ago. And with his beer-drinking, good-time-loving attitude, Storm is just the kind of wrestler that appeals to the adult male wrestling fan. The ladies probably don't object too much to the combination of Storm and Roode either.

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Al Castle finds it almost laughable that TNA and WWE would be tripping over themselves to incorporate *The Jersey Shore* cast members into their programming. Snooki in a tag team match with Morrison and Trish at WM27? As The Miz would say, "Really?"

And yet, but for a few months between 2009 and 2010, Storm and Roode were miscast as despicable bad guys. Thankfully, that wrong has been righted. Let's drink to that ... although why ODB was never given a job as Beer Money's valet is beyond us.

VISITING THE SHORE

Who would have thought that, in 2011, there would be a race between TNA and WWE for the use of a handful of trashy reality show starlets whose only talents are their abilities to get drunk and get arrested?

TNA was the first to jump on *The Jersey Shore* bandwagon when they brought in Jenni "J-Woww" Farley for a one-night angle with the '*Shore*-inspired act of Robbie E and Cookie. A few months later, TNA hired former '*Shore* cast member Angelina Pivarnick as a semi-regular performer.

Not to be outdone, WWE went out and hired arguably the biggest (or smallest?) star of the show—Nicole "Snooki" Polizzi—and convinced her to compete in an actual match at WrestleMania.

I can't help but wonder: *When are some of The 'Shore's male cast members going to cross over into the wrestling world?* After all, "The Fist Pump" is a fine name for a finisher.

I can see it now: Cena vs. The Situation.

AT THE BALLPARK

Vince McMahon, for your consideration: WrestleMania 30 in the new Yankee Stadium. It's true, as a spoiled New Yorker, I've had more opportunities than most fans to witness WrestleMania in my own backyard. And all indications are that, like the first, 10th, and 20th installments, it's nearly a given that the 30th edition of "The Granddaddy Of Them All" will return to New York City.

But why should WWE limit itself to the confines of the 20,000-seat Madison Square Garden? For an event as monumental as WrestleMania 30, why not go to the namesake of the most storied venue in sports history?

New York's early-spring temperatures may discourage WWE from playing an outdoor venue in "The Big Apple," but it's nothing a little creativity and some very large heaters over the ring can't address. If the original Yankee Stadium was "The House That Ruth Built," why can't the new Yankee Stadium be "The House Where Cena Took On The Undertaker"? □

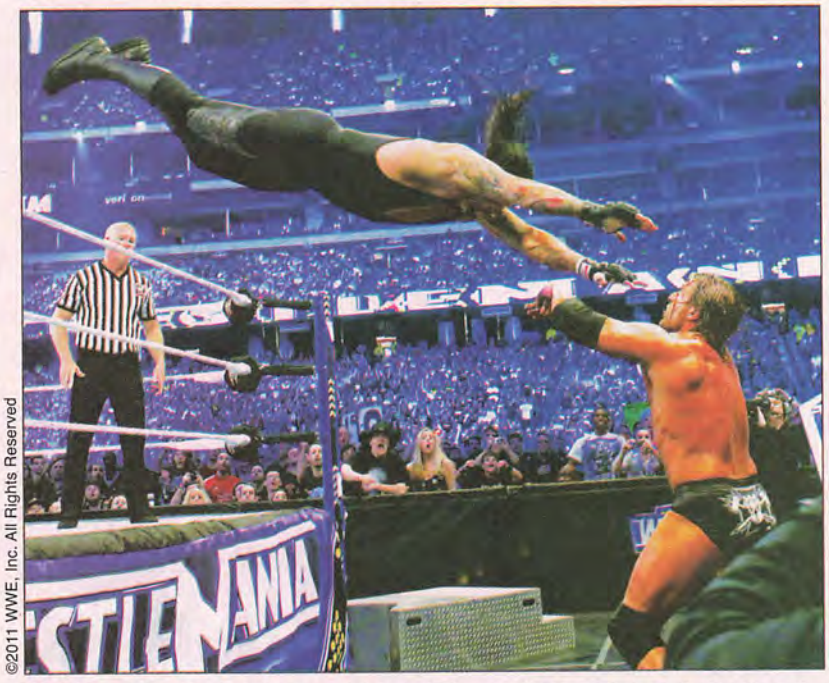
KREW-CUTS

BY FRANK KREWDA

Act your age. If Texas Rangers President Nolan Ryan took to an MLB mound, fans would no longer expect to see the 95-mph-plus fastball he was once so famous for hurling. Likewise, If Wayne Gretzky laced up the skates at his current age, fans would understand if he didn't dazzle them the way he did in the late-'80s. And NBA fans would certainly understand if a returning Michael Jordan failed to drop 52 points a night on his opponents.

However, I don't think wrestling fans relax their standards for The Undertaker one bit when WrestleMania rolls around. As the author of a 19-0 'Mania winning streak, he is required to be at the very top of his game at the annual event, no matter what time and injuries do to his body.

At WrestleMania 27, The Undertaker put out an effort seldom seen from men 20 years his junior. Even at his current age and physical condition, it was very clear, to me at least, that 'Taker was reaching for a higher gear vs. Triple-H.



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Watching The Undertaker push himself beyond his physical limits was the highlight of WrestleMania 27 for Frank Krewda, who says UT trumped The Rock at the event.

The match was not perfect, but seeing 'Taker put his body on the line with so many risky, high-impact moves in that match was not only the highlight of the bout for me, it was the highlight of the event.

Some might say that it is foolish of 'Taker to take such risks at this stage of his career, but I applaud the "Dead Man" for striving to give fans their money's worth at the biggest wrestling event of the year.

The Rock has become fond of claiming that he "brings it." But UT's WM27 contribution was far more electrifying than anything The Rock brought.

For me, watching 'Taker push himself beyond his physical limits was a true 'Mania moment on a card that produced hardly any.

The sunny side of the street. Say what you will about TNA and its state of affairs (we certainly have), but since it seems that just about all TNA chatter is negative these days, I figured some perspective might not hurt.

As of press time, much had been said of TNA's inability to pull out of the 1.1-1.2 average *Impact* ratings quagmire. While TNA and Spike would no doubt like to see those numbers higher, it should be mentioned that those ratings translate to roughly 1,700,000 weekly viewers.

Sure, compared to *Raw* and *Smackdown, Impact's* figures may appear skimpy. But 1.7 million is not an insignificant number. Just ask Eddie Edwards or Madison Eagles how they would feel about nearly two million people watching their matches each week.

Or, ask NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman, whose league's regular season games draw an average 0.2 rating on Versus, despite the NHL being a member of professional sports' so-called "Big Four." How badly would he like to score a 1.2? Badly enough that he's willing to eliminate every vestige of physicality from the game if it means broader mainstream acceptance.

A 1.2 rating may imply that *Impact* isn't ready to take on *Raw* or *Smackdown* anytime soon, but it also suggests something else: that TNA, for all its flaws, is doing some things right. A million-and-a half people do not stick around for no reason. They do not tune in week after week by accident. And as long as a million-and-a

Morgan vs. Anderson may not be as enthralling to fans as The Rock vs. Cena, but that doesn't mean nobody's watching *Impact*. Ratings may not yet be where Spike TV and TNA want them, but more than 1.5 million people are tuning in on Thursday nights.That's quite a substantial number.

half people are tuning in each week, TNA has an opportunity to attract new viewers.

Consider that *WWE Superstars*, which averaged a .57 rating (544,000 weekly viewers), was dropped by WGN in early-April, ostensibly because the network felt there was not a large enough audience.

By this comparison, TNA may be in better shape than its critics want to admit. Granted, *Impact* has hardly been can't-miss viewing over the past year, and TNA is still struggling in the pay-per-view market, but if it can fight back from the 0.5 ratings that followed its ill-fated jump to Monday nights last year, it can certainly add to its core Thursday-night crowd. And, by the way, TNA deserves *a lot* of credit for re-establishing itself to the extent it has on Thursday nights.

The bottom line: Because people are still watching *Impact*—although not as many as TNA and Spike might want—the potential to achieve greater ratings and a wider audience is still there.

Of course, how TNA goes about achieving them is an entirely different matter.

Buzz-cuts ... Bringing Brodus Clay into the fold was a colossal mistake by Alberto Del Rio. At WM27, Del Rio actually had to take time out of his World title match to protect his bodyguard from Christian at ringside. But enough about Del Rio. What really matters is not that he failed to take the World title from Edge, but the amount of damage Edge and Christian inflicted on Del Rio's car after the match ... Charlie Haas and Shelton Benjamin defeated The Kings of Wrestling for the Ring of Honor tag team title on April 1, but will The World's Greatest Tag Team have an opportunity to live up to its name? On paper, ROH boasts a deep and diverse tag team roster. But in reality, the Briscoes and American Wolves have been all but dissolved to add depth to ROH's singles ranks, and there's no reason to believe Claudio Castagnoli and Chris Hero won't meet the same fate ... Speaking of dissolved tag teams, it appears as if Max and Jeremy Buck have been consigned to the state of purgatory that is TNA's X division. The once-promising tandem of Generation Me has been fractured by infighting, and now the brothers are engaged in a heated feud ... Still can't figure out why Jerry Lawler would be DQ'd because Steve Austin overstepped his boundaries as referee of the Lawler-Cole match at 'Mania. That's Lawler's fault? ... Also curious as to how much longer Cody Rhodes will be allowed to wear his protective face shield since we can all see clearly that there is nothing wrong with his face. □

CHASING THE DREAM:
MIKE BENNETT

BY GERRY STRAUSS

The dedicated men and women who choose to pursue a career in professional wrestling rarely start anywhere near the top. Often, their roads are long, hard, and just plain weird. "Chasing The Dream" features an established wrestler who will reveal his or her long, strange path to stardom.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Although he often wears a smile in the ring these days, Mike Bennett's earliest experience with professional wrestling was not very pleasant—at least what he can remember of it!

SOME YOUNG ATHLETES get into the wrestling game because it is their family business. Some gravitate to it from bouncing, bodybuilding, or other contact sports. Others simply pursue it because they desperately need the money.

Mike Bennett did it because he was a childhood Hulkamaniac.

"I became a wrestling fan when I was about five," recalled Bennett, who is currently ranked number 10 in Ring of Honor. "I followed wrestling for probably two more years after that, then stopped watching it. Right around the time I turned 12, all of my friends started talking about 'Stone-Cold' Steve Austin, so I gave wrestling another shot. I was hooked from that point on."

A few years later, Bennett's passion became his professional aspiration.

"I decided when I turned 16 that I was going to be a pro wrestler, so I convinced my parents to let me sign up for wrestling school," chuckled Bennett. "It took a lot of convincing and begging, but eventually they gave in and decided they'd let me give it a shot."

Mentally, Bennett was all set to becoming "The Prodigy," but first he had to find the right path to success.

"My first experience with a wrestling school was not a great one," Bennett sighed. "I definitely wasn't being trained properly ... that was, until I ran into 'Brutal' Bob Evans. I would say my real training started with Bob when I was just about 17. Luckily, that situation expanded into training with guys like Steve Bradley, Rip Rogers, and Spike Dudley."

Most young wrestlers always remember their first match with fondness. Bennett can't remember his at all.

"I was dropped on my head, knocked out, and received a concussion," he said. "I believe I was being picked up for a power bomb, and my opponent decided that I was going to go down on the top of my head. All I remember is making my way to the ring, and then it's all a blank."

Luckily, Bennett has since competed in many other matches that he can actually recall. For several years, he has been a staple of the New England region, also competing in high-profile matches for Northeast Wrestling against the likes of TNA's Matt Hardy and Mr. Anderson.

In 2010, several tryouts and lower-card matches for Ring of Honor led to a full-time spot on the roster. Through sheer work ethic, patience, and dedication, a young Hulkamaniac has become a "Prodigy."

WEIRDEST INDEPENDENT EVENT YOU APPEARED AT: "That would be a show I did in Connecticut a few years back. It was at an outdoor car show, but it was the weirdest car show I've ever seen. The cars were terrible. It was in this open field way back in the woods, and about five people were actually watching the show."

WORST WRESTLING INJURY: "I've actually been pretty fortunate. I've had bumps and bruises and sprains, but nothing too bad. My worst injury would have to be just a concussion. I shouldn't say *just* a concussion, because with all the studies on head injuries now, I guess a concussion is a pretty big deal."

STRANGEST ROAD STORY: "I was traveling home from a show in Connecticut, where it had snowed the night before. I was driving a beat-up Chevy Tracker with a bunch of wrestlers and four bald tires, going about 65 mph in a 45-mph zone, and we hit black ice. My car must have spun around what seemed like 50 times before it came to a complete stop. All these guys were screaming the whole time we were spinning, and the wrestler in the back seat was holding on to the passenger seat because his door had flown open and he was falling out."

BIGGEST INFLUENCES: "Many people have been extremely helpful in helping advance my career. Promoter Mike O'Brien has played a role by putting me in big matches and believing in me, which has translated into major opportunities. Also, Mike 'Simon Dean/Nova' Bucci played a giant role in helping me get looked at and put on the wrestling radar. Kevin Kelly has been very instrumental in my career, and has been a great friend. Also, guys like Jim Cornette and Delirious have been big influences."

Bennett, wrestling against Andy "Right Leg" Ridge, credits several people with helping him advance his career to the point where he's now a full-time member of the ROH roster.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Sting snares Jeff Hardy in a Scorpion Deathlock. Sting, now a three-time TNA World champion at 52, was the subject of Internet rumors that had him going to WWE for WrestleMania. As mysterious as ever, Sting chooses not to address the rumors directly.

Photo by George Tahinos/TNA Wrestling

STING

EVEN IF HE never won another match, Sting's legacy as one of the greats of the modern wrestling era would be secure. In the words of the 52-year-old "Icon," however, the "fire hasn't stopped burning yet." Indeed, Sting has shown no signs of slowing down anytime soon.

Shortly after re-signing with TNA following the expiration of his contract, Sting unseated Jeff Hardy as TNA World champion. The title victory marked the start of Sting's third reign atop TNA and 14th world championship overall, including his WCW and NWA title reigns. Thereafter, Sting pinned Hardy in less than 90 seconds (actually within 20 seconds after the combatants finally locked up) in a highly controversial rematch at the Victory Road pay-per-view event.

*A four-time winner of **PWI**'s Most Popular Wrestler award, Sting is the only major former WCW star never to appear in Vince McMahon's WWE. At this point, it seems as if he'll finish his storied career in TNA. So far, it looks like Sting's choice to stay with TNA was the right decision, as he has re-established himself as one of the company's franchise performers.*

"The Icon" recently sat down with Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda and contributing writers Bill Meltzer and Brady Hicks. He looked back at some career highlights, gave his thoughts about his most recent title victory and feud with the Immortal faction, and provided a sneak peek into what may lie ahead.

EVERY ISSUE, REPORTERS FROM PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED WILL PARTICIPATE IN AN INCISIVE PRESS CONFERENCE WITH A TOP WRESTLING STAR. THE QUESTIONS WILL BE DEMANDING. AND THE ANSWERS WILL REVEAL THE INNERMOST THOUGHTS OF THE GIANTS OF THE SPORTS

Frank Krewda: So far at least, your return to TNA has been a huge success. In quick order, you've gained the upper hand in your feud with the Immortal faction. You've added yet another TNA World championship to your collection of belts, and you've had Eric Bischoff and Hulk Hogan scrambling for effective ways to exact revenge. Not too shabby, huh?

> "Whether they're rooting for me or against me, I still get that awesome adrenaline rush when I hear the fans screaming."

Sting: I can't complain. Things have been going my way. But if there's one thing I've learned over the years, it's that you never know what's coming around the next corner. I had unfinished business in TNA, and it's still unfinished. Bischoff and Hogan are still trying to throw me curveballs, but I've got a few surprises in store for them, too.

Brady Hicks: Is that why you elected to stay in TNA rather than make the much-rumored jump to WWE?

Sting: Rumors, rumors [*laughs*]. Hey, I've always been about doing what feels right both for the short-term and long-term. When I looked at TNA, I thought there was more for me to accomplish in a positive way over the long-term as well as the immediate future.

Krewda: Why have you elected throughout your career to shun offers from WWE?

Sting: It's just worked out that way, Frank. I never specifically set out to avoid working there. The creative fit was better for me in WCW just as it is for me in TNA.

Bill Meltzer: Although you've been in the wrestling business for a quarter-century now and have been one of its biggest stars for 20-plus years, you have also been one of its more private personalities. For example, you don't plaster your every thought and opinion all over the Internet, and you don't do many formal interviews. What is it that makes Sting tick?

Sting: You sound like Hogan, Bill [*laughs*]. [*Imitating Hogan*] 'Sting, what makes you tick, brother?' In the ring, it's the fans. No question about it. Whether they're rooting for me or against me, I still get that awesome adrenaline rush when I hear the fans screaming. It's pretty cool and humbling to have fans come up to me and tell me they used to come to WCW shows with their faces painted and now they take their own kids to TNA shows to see me, and the kid's face is painted in the white and black makeup. Out of the ring, it's my family and God that motivate me above all else.

Hicks: Do title belts still motivate you?

Sting: To a degree, yes. But titles aren't the be-all and end-all to me. The biggest thing in going after the TNA World championship again was to make sure the title was represented honorably, in a way that people could be proud of.

Krewda: We would be remiss if we didn't ask you exactly what happened in that match at Victory Road with Hardy. Do you care to comment?

Sting: I don't want be rude about it, Frank, but no. I think everything that needs to be said about that match has already been said. If you've seen the

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

match, you know what happened.

Meltzer: Clearly you were unhappy with the way everything unfolded, even though you won the match literally without having to break a sweat.

Sting: I think everyone was hoping for a lot more that night.

Hicks: Let's switch gears. Which persona during your career have you enjoyed the most: your original Blade Runners days, the blond, spiky-haired Sting with the California cool image, or the dark-haired, brooding and mysterious version of Sting?

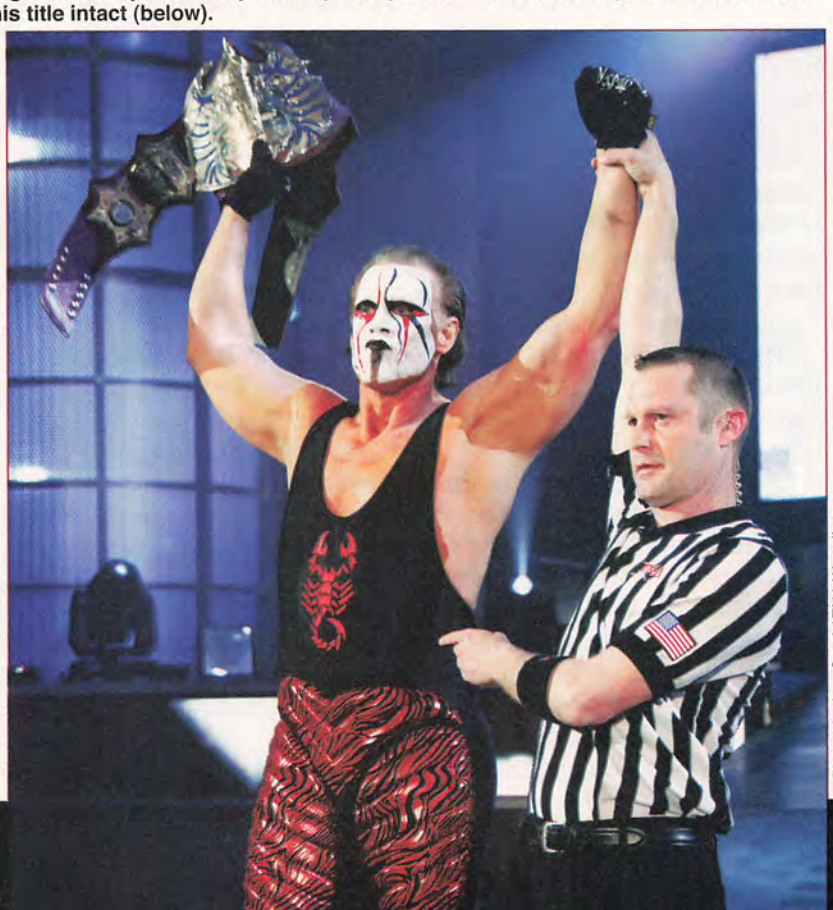
Sting: The best answer I can give you is that I enjoyed all of them at the time I was doing them. In terms of Sting—and the same thing goes for The Undertaker or Hulk Hogan or anyone who's been in this business a long time—there have been some times where I realized I needed to reinvent myself.

Meltzer: On a recent episode of *Impact*, you alluded to having trust issues with Rob Van Dam, whom you've wrestled with and against. Can you elaborate on your relationship with RVD?

Sting: Basically, it goes back to Rob's TNA debut. He kind of blindsided me in our match that night, and I felt I had to make a statement, which is why I went a little crazy with the bat. Hey, the Impact Zone is my house, and nobody comes in there and ambushes me in my house. Then, the following week, he suckered me during my ring entrance. I like Rob and respect him as a wrestler, and I'm willing to team with him at times, but I can't forget that

Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Sting's match against Hardy at Victory Road (above) ended in controversy, but "The Stinger" emerged with his title intact (below).



Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Rob Van Dam's quick win over Sting in March 2010 led to a brief feud, but Sting's subsequent battles with Hardy and Mr. Anderson have allowed him accept RVD as a part-time ally.

he's after one thing, the TNA title.

Hicks: But you guys seem like such a cohesive unit when you partner up. Would you consider teaming with RVD on a more regular basis?

Sting: Obviously, my top priority right now is defending the World title, but if TNA puts us in matches together, so be it. Rob is an excellent wrestler, I don't need to tell you that. And despite our differences, I can still trust him much more than I can trust people like Ken Anderson or Jeff Hardy. So, the short answer is I have no problem teaming with RVD, but I don't have any specific plans to pursue a full-time tag team with him or anybody.

Krewda: You've taken several extended hiatuses from the ring during your career and have preferred to wrestle a fairly moderate schedule in recent years. Is that a concession to age or an issue of staying healthy and motivated?

Sting: I don't see anything wrong with stepping away from time to time. I have made a great living in this business, but wrestling all the time can wear you down. I never want to just go through the motions out there. I step away for a while when it makes sense for me to step away and I come back when the time and situation feel right.

Hicks: I would also say that your absences and reappearances have definitely added to the aura of your wrestling persona. You have the element of surprise in your favor.

Sting: Yeah, I'd agree with that.

Meltzer: Who would you say your toughest opponent has been?

Sting: Do you mean recently or all-time?

Meltzer: Both.

Sting: In more recent years, it's always been a great challenge to go up against someone like AJ Styles or Kurt Angle. In terms of all-time, I really can't pick just one or two people. Guys like Eddie Gilbert, Ric Flair, Hogan, Kevin Nash, and Jeff Jarrett have all been important to my career both as enemies or allies at various times, so I'll credit all of them.

Krewda: Earlier, you mentioned your bond with the fans. One thing that I've noticed even during your heel runs is that your storyline change in direction always had more to do with feuds with other wrestlers than rejecting the fans themselves. Is that a fair description?

Sting: Absolutely. The fans may not always agree with my motivations and actions, but the mutual respect is always there. At the end of the day, people know that Sting will always fight the good fight. ☐

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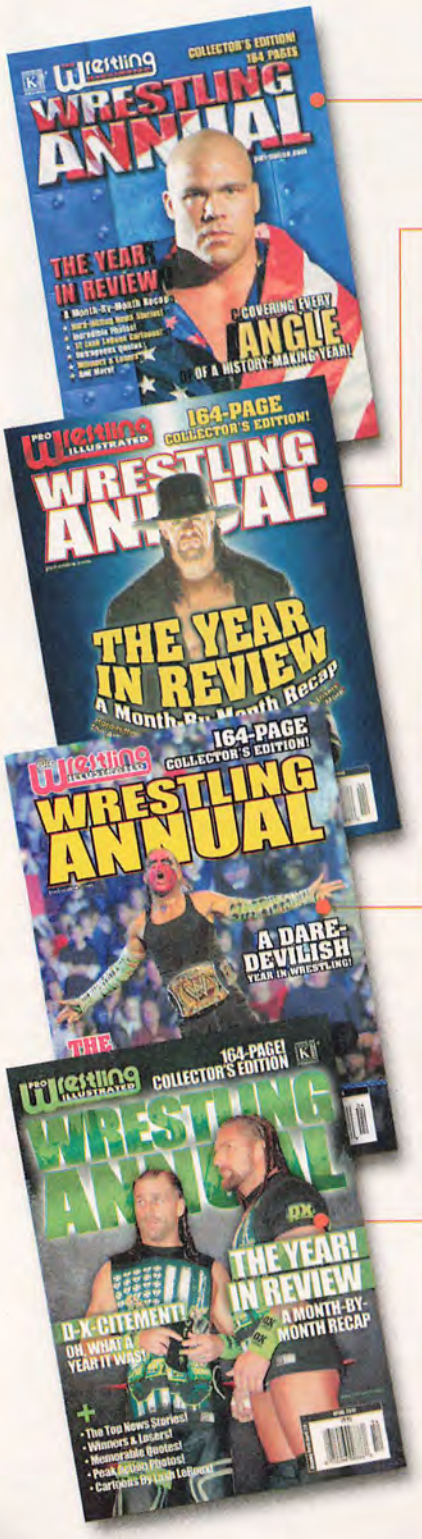

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PWI'S STATE OF THE GAME ADDRESS

"IT IS WHAT it is."

That may be the most aggravating phrase ever to worm its way into the American vernacular. It is a lazy expression of acquiescence, the equivalent of throwing one's hands into the air and accepting the status quo unchallenged. It's also redundant; simply saying, "it is" conveys the same message with 60 percent fewer words.

We don't mean to step on the late grammarian James Kilpatrick's toes by further expressing our displeasure with the phrase. Suffice it to say, "It is what it is" doesn't cut it with the editors of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED ... especially when it comes to pro wrestling.

We don't believe in taking anything in wrestling at face value. We prefer to dissect the status quo. We prefer to analyze the sport's top stars, to examine business plans, and to prognosticate about the future. That is the basis for our annual "State Of ..." edition of *PWI*.

On the following pages, our top writers examine a variety of facets of the wrestling business. We evaluate the state of the major wrestling promotions and brands, including Raw, Smackdown, TNA, and Ring of Honor. We examine the state of the international scene, and the state of the business itself, analyzing trends and forecasting how wrestling will weather the fiscal challenges of the coming year.

We also evaluate a handful of the sport's top stars, identifying their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges for the coming year.

In short, our "State Of ..." issue allows us to take a snapshot of the worldwide wrestling scene and attempt to divine a "State Of The Industry" analysis.

Of course, the inherent unpredictability of the wrestling business makes this kind of detailed analysis challenging. In fact, we were just about to go to press with this issue when Edge announced his retirement, forcing us to remove him from our "State Of The Stars" section and replace him with Sheamus. That's part of wrestling's appeal. Things can change at any moment. Even the best analysis cannot predict when one wrestler will develop into a breakthrough sensation or when the right combustible elements come together and explode, pushing the industry into a new boom period.

That unpredictability notwithstanding, our "State Of ..." reports are grounded in research and careful consideration of the events likely to unfold over the coming months. We believe this issue delivers the most insightful and far-reaching analysis of the wrestling industry available. It is intended to provoke discussion and debate, and to outline some scenarios that are likely to develop.

We hope you enjoy the "State Of's ..." that follow. And we hope that "It is what it is" gets retired to the dustbin of clichés.

STATE OF RAW

Vince McMahon has built his career on making us believe his version of reality. But how will WWE's new marketing campaign affect Raw? Will WWE's flagship brand really become bigger, badder, and better?

"BIGGER. BADDER. BETTER." That's the tagline for the new marketing campaign that WWE launched at WrestleMania 27. WWE claims to have evolved into something bigger, badder, and better, but is that true? We shouldn't have to look any further than its flagship brand, Raw, to determine whether that's the case. Is Raw capable of becoming bigger, badder, and better in 2011? *Hmmmm.* Let's see whether Raw passes the Triple-B test.

WWE capitalized on the momentum from WrestleMania 27 by presenting a four-hour power block on USA Network the night following the big event. *Raw* was the anchor for the special that preceded it—the WWE Hall of Fame ceremony—and the program that followed it, the season premiere of *Tough Enough*. USA Network has always sought to fully exploit the ratings-rich WWE, but both USA and WWE have been skittish about adding a third hour to *Raw*. After all, *WCW Nitro* attempted this during the Monday Night War and the extra hour was viewed as a blessing by some and a curse by others.

So what's the alternative? As part of its deal with USA, WWE has agreed to produce four three-hour editions of *Raw* annually, which included King of the Ring, draft lottery, homecoming, and Slammy Awards specials over the past year. *Tough Enough* is the ideal vehicle for both USA and WWE, considering that it's more reality show than wrestling. Insert cynical comment here.

Tough Enough might be the perfect solution for USA—and it might also explain WWE's re-energized business strategy. Vince McMahon realizes that he can fill only so many broadcast hours with pro wrestling before networks start to balk and it begins to dilute his entire product. That definitely holds true for the WWE-themed television network he has in mind. Even if WWE must produce a wrestling pro-

Even though he wasn't wearing a WWE world title as of press time, John Cena remains the headline attraction on Raw. It will be interesting to see whether fan support for "The Champ" rises or falls as he gears up for his WM28 showdown with "The Rock."

gram, it can produce enough derivatives of that product through reality programming, and sitcoms starring Santino and Vladimir. Who knows—Vince McMahon might want to dust off his Larry King microphone from *Tuesday Night Titans* and host his own talk show.

And that is how WWE and USA executives now view *Raw*—as a rock-solid centerpiece to be built around. *Raw* was once considered a ratings juggernaut, which implied that it gained high numbers but no one quite understood why (except wrestling fans, of course, and they didn't count). Today, it is easy to imagine USA's entire Monday night lineup consisting of nothing but WWE programming within a couple of years.

Raw is to Vincent K. McMahon's 21st-century WWE what Madison Square Garden was to Vincent J. McMahon's WWWF. It is still the energy force within the organization—and it is the best barometer for how business is doing at the time. So, for WWE to succeed, *Raw* must succeed. There is no other way.

Photo by George Napolitano

While some fans might be down on Cena, just about everybody loathes the underhanded, loud-mouthed Miz, who has risen from reality TV personality to WWE heavyweight champion.

That certainly doesn't mean *Raw* is going to become bawdier, more violent, or more controversial. Because of *Raw's* TV-PG rating, the product isn't going to regress back to the Attitude Era, complete with chair shots, blood, and Mark Henry dating transvestites. So what does "badder" mean, exactly? It means that Raw's athletes are going to be stronger, sleeker, and speedier than ever. After all, if Raw can't resort to the creative shortcuts of the Attitude Era, then there's more pressure on the performers to deliver top-notch matches within the confines of the ring.

Interestingly, that also means that WWE wrestlers will have to give more of an illusion that they're "bad." Now that they can't bash skulls or beat opponents to bloody pulps, they're going to have to at least talk a tougher game. That means sharper, more direct promos that ooze attitude and coolness. The Rock is the perfect example of a performer who can exude toughness without laying a finger on another person. The Rock sent fear into the heart of The Miz—and perhaps even John Cena—without his foot having to make contact with their candy asses.

And so, the question is this: Does the Raw roster—as it is currently constituted—have the personnel to become badder?

Let's start at the top. Exit Chris Jericho. Enter The Miz. Although Jericho and The Miz co-existed in WWE for quite some time, and even teamed together for a brief while, it really does seem that The Miz has flawlessly taken Jericho's spot and even taken it to a higher level. And what is that spot? That is the breathtakingly, astronomically egomaniacal spot. Not only is that always a very entertaining persona (e.g. Gorgeous George), but it also evokes instant hatred from the fans. And it isn't cheap heat. Yeah, ragging on the local sports team is cheap heat. But bragging about oneself incessantly keeps the focus on the character. And while it can be highly comedic, there is also a hint of danger because fans realize that this wrestler will do absolutely anything to maintain that self-perception.

Shortly after The Miz captured the WWE title, Jericho told Hot 97 in New York that Miz had better be careful not to become merely a backpedaling champion who only wins matches by luck or in tight squeakers. Jericho said he was pigeonholed into such a role during his first reign as WWE

Photo by George Napolitano

As time marches on, the bitter feud between CM Punk and Randy Orton isn't likely to wane, as Punk has sworn vengeance for his WrestleMania 27 loss to "The Viper."

Undisputed champion back in 2001-02. He warned that a champion had to be an "ass-kicker" on some level if he were to be taken seriously. Jericho didn't make the same mistakes during his World heavyweight title reigns of 2008 and 2010—even if it meant punching Shawn Michaels' wife!

If WWE champ The Miz is the consummate heel on Raw, then it's a forgone conclusion that John Cena is the consummate fan favorite. He won't even turn heel when the WWE Universe is booing the hell out of him! And Cena is such a merchandising machine, it's hard to believe that WWE will turn him heel anytime soon. Come on, how could "Fruity Pebbles" turn his back on the Cenation? Besides, Cena has his showdown with The Rock at WrestleMania 28 to consider. The fact that Cena and The Rock are both fan favorites is part of the magic. Fans can't figure out who will win that encounter (although conventional wisdom says Cena, because he's the future of the company, but anything could happen).

So how will Cena keep busy until his WrestleMania match against The Rock? The Corre gave Cena and Rock a beatdown the night after 'Mania 27, although Cena and Rock mounted comebacks and polished them off as *Raw* went off the air. With The Corre on Smackdown, Cena may consider his dust-up with Wade Barrett and his cohorts to be a closed case. After all, WWE would become a chaotic place with Cena singlehandedly feuding with The Corre as Randy Orton singlehandedly feuds with The Nexus.

Speaking of which, "The Viper" is lurking in the weeds, ready to strike. His WWE title loss to The Miz was humiliating. And his victory over CM Punk at WrestleMania might have finally put an end to his feud with The Nexus. Who's left? There's always Cena. Sure, these two have feuded ad nauseam in the past, but Orton has an even more vicious edge now. He poses a physical danger to anyone in his path. Orton hit a dead-end as a fan favorite because he's unlikely to get another shot at The Miz and he's never going to become more popular than Cena. His dark persona would be more appropriate for a villainous role. The scary part is that we can't begin to imagine how heinous Orton can really be.

Another target could be Triple-H. Yes, it's another feud revisited. But for all the talk of The Undertaker being a "Last Outlaw" and how the wear and tear on his old bones could finally lead to his undoing at WrestleMania 28, the same could be said for "The Game." Triple-H is 41 years old and he is settling into his role as senior advisor in WWE and as head of international talent recruitment. With a cushy office and a water cooler around the corner, how much drive does Triple-H have left in him? Last year, we stated that Triple-H was evolving into The Undertaker of the Raw brand. Considering his sporadic appearances over the past year, any matchups involving Triple-H would have a degree of freshness about them.

Besides The Undertaker, Triple-H is the last remaining legend from the Attitude Era. Any wrestler lucky enough to score a win over "The Game" would get the pass-the-torch rub.

CM Punk has made a career out of picking the bones of decaying carcasses, so it wouldn't be a surprise if he suddenly appeared to catch Triple-H at a moment of weakness. He did it to Rick Steamboat in Ring of Honor. His success with cashing in Money in the Bank briefcases took exploiting vulnerability to a championship art form. Likewise, he cobbled together the Straight-Edge Society from a hodge-podge of outcasts. And, like a vulture, he

swooped in to the leadership vacuum created by Wade Barrett and became the unlikely leader of The New Nexus.

But the SES and The Nexus experienced only moderate success because Punk looks out for himself, not for the good of the team. The members of The Nexus must be looking across to Smackdown, where The Corre is having much more success. Not only did The Corre take the initiative and ruin the "magic moment" between Cena and The Rock on *Raw*, but Wade Barrett is the Intercontinental champion and Justin Gabriel and Heath Slater are the WWE tag team champions. Still smarting from his WrestleMania loss to Orton, Punk will likely have to leave The Nexus to reinvigorate his cult of personality.

Besides, the remaining Nexus members—all of whom are due to return after suffering injuries at the hands of Orton—must be looking to revamp. David Otunga stood up to Wade Barrett in the waning days of the original Nexus and he seemed to be a natural for the leadership role. If he can stand up to Punk, then it is likely that the other members—including Husky Harris, Michael McGillicutty, and Mason Ryan—will follow his lead. While many wrestlers still think of Otunga as a newcomer, we must consider that he is the only remaining member of the original Nexus, and, by that standard, the newer members consider him a veteran. "The A-Lister" has the opportunity—and the talent—to step out in 2011. It's up to him to seize the opportunity.

And where does U.S. champion Sheamus fit into all this? The problem during the latter half of 2010 is that Sheamus had trouble finding his niche on the Raw brand, despite being the King of the Ring and a former WWE champ. The office, particularly Triple-H, is high on Sheamus. The skinny on Sheamus is that he's on par with Cena in terms of attitude, talent, and work ethic—and those are the three basic ingredients that WWE requires of a main-event star. Creative didn't feel pressure to push Sheamus to the moon in 2010 because they're confident that he will be a solid employee for years to come.

There's no question Orton would love to get a rematch with WWE champion Miz, the man who took Orton's title last November. Raw's fans would love nothing more than to see Orton dethrone The Miz.

It's interesting that Sin Cara targeted Sheamus immediately upon his first Raw appearance the day after WrestleMania. That will increase the value of the U.S. title and ensures that Sin Cara will not be lost in the dark-match shuffle with Evan Bourne. Hey, at least Sheamus is getting into the spirit of being U.S. champ by wearing red, white, and blue ring gear. Could a fan favorite turn be in the offing?

Nevertheless, Sheamus had to be disappointed when his U.S. title defense against Daniel Bryan was removed from the WrestleMania pay-per-view broadcast. After all, he'd faced Triple-H the year before. In fact, Sheamus winning the U.S. title is viewed as a boost to the U.S. title instead of the other way around. Daniel Bryan, for all his talent, was treated like a jobber even when he had the U.S. strap around his waist. It's like NWA junior champ Denny Brown getting pinned in televised tag team matches every week. Bryan has good reason to be concerned about his future in WWE. With Chris Benoit purged from WWE history, Bryan seemed to be a good candidate to take the technical workhorse spot.

Dolph Ziggler and John Morrison are quite evenly matched wrestlers, and both are looking to take the next step up to Raw's top tier. How their feud pans out could determine which one makes that leap.

Now he'll be lucky to land the Koko B. Ware spot.

John Morrison, on the other hand, is the WWE prototype: young, good-looking, and sporting six-pack abs. That is until Creative requires him to speak. Despite the dazzling ring attire and the Beyonce wind-blower, he still has a West Virginia twang and a cue-card delivery. It will be interesting to see how long WWE keeps Morrison at this cusp-of-greatness level. Maybe we should call Shelton Benjamin to get his take.

Perhaps Dolph Ziggler is destined to take the spot once envisioned for Morrison. He is just as talented in the ring and has a stronger hint of charisma. And with Vickie Guerrero as his girlfriend/manager, he has garnered some incredible heat over the past several months. The former Intercontinental champ is likely to make a U.S. title bid at some point. And then WWE may acclimate him to top-tier status through televised tag team main events, a Survivor Series elimination match, the Elimination Chamber, and all the other usual avenues that will allow Ziggler to share the spotlight with bigger stars.

Santino Marella is hotter than ever as comic relief at WWE events. When enthusiasm in Marella seems to wane, he simply makes a minor tweak—such as the introduction of his Cobra "finisher"—and he's driving fans wild again. And Marella and Vladi-

Can he have your attention? Michael Cole has been drawing lots of attention to himself lately by virtue of his battles with Jerry Lawler. But unlike "The King," it seems fans would prefer to have Cole behind a podium than in a ring.

Though she is every bit a Diva, WWE had done little to help Eve connect with fans. In fact, the MSG crowd was most likely more pumped to see Tammy "Sunny" Sytch referee this match than they were to see Eve wrestle.

mir Kozlov had a run as WWE World tag team champions in 2010-11. Congratulations to Santino for accomplishing a rare feat: achieving staying power through sheer comedy. Fortunately, he didn't suffer the same fate as Eugene. Or is that U-Gene?

Where is Ted DiBiase Jr.? We're told that Princeton scientists have invented telescopes so powerful that they can see inside of an atom. Even if we had one of those, we wouldn't be able to find Ted DiBiase's career.

Maryse, the femme fatale who helped sink DiBiase's career into oblivion, is likely to jump back into the Divas division full-time, and, quite frankly, Divas champion Eve Torres seems ripe for the picking. Maryse, after all, held the Divas championship for 216 days, the longest reign since the title's inception in 2008—and the formidable Mickie James was one of her most persistent challengers.

And who is Eve Torres? We don't really know. The WWE Universe has been given almost no reason to support her in any way. Come on, Creative, give us a backstory vignette, a heel turn, a dazzling promo, a career-defining match—something! We're sure she's a nice girl and she did have an "aw-shucks, I'm blushing" sort of exchange with The Rock backstage at WrestleMania. But she came across as a fan, not a Diva. She's now into her second reign. Do we care?

Don't get us wrong. We're not saying that Eve doesn't have talent, and we're darn sure that contenders such as Natalya, Melina, and Gail Kim can provide some terrific matches in 2011. Some of the other Divas—such as Alicia Fox, The Bella Twins, and Tamina—still have something to prove—if only they're given a chance.

And it's the same old song regarding the tag team division: There is no tag team division. Justin Gabriel and Heath Slater are the WWE World tag team champions and technically are allowed to defend the title on either the Raw or Smackdown brand. But it makes sense that Gabriel and Slater, as members of The Corre, currently have more of a presence on Smackdown.

And, as is tradition, we'd like to conclude with some comments about Raw's announce team. What a mess. Longtime fans rejoiced the night after WrestleMania when Jim Ross was sitting at the broadcast table, but it only took Michael Cole a couple of squirts of barbecue sauce to send "good ol' J.R." to the back. The result was Josh Mathews and Booker T at the announce table and Michael Cole in the "Cole Mine" structure. The disarray among the broadcast team leads to a lack of continuity, which affected WrestleMania and has plagued *Raw* for the past several months. The lead announcer should occupy the "voice of reason" on a wrestling broadcast, and Cole certainly does not fit that bill.

So, does *Raw* pass the "Bigger, Badder, Better" test? Vince McMahon's big plans in the months and years ahead ensure that Raw will become bigger in significance, if not in scope. The combination of young veterans and younger up-and-comers makes it likely that Raw will become badder in the athletic sense. Better? Let's get together a year from now and see whether that's really the case.

—Harry Burkett

STATE OF SMACKD

Smackdown may be 2-0 in Bragging Rights trophies, but the blue brand still suffers the stigma of being WWE's "B" show. Changing networks three times since its 1999 debut has done little to change that perception

Last October, *Smackdown* moved from MyNetworkTV to Syfy, once again forcing viewers to change their viewing habits and reset their DVRs. Add to that a tough Friday night time slot (typically a poor night for television ratings in general), and it's little wonder that *Smackdown* has struggled to attract new viewers and to retain its core audience, resulting in a rat-

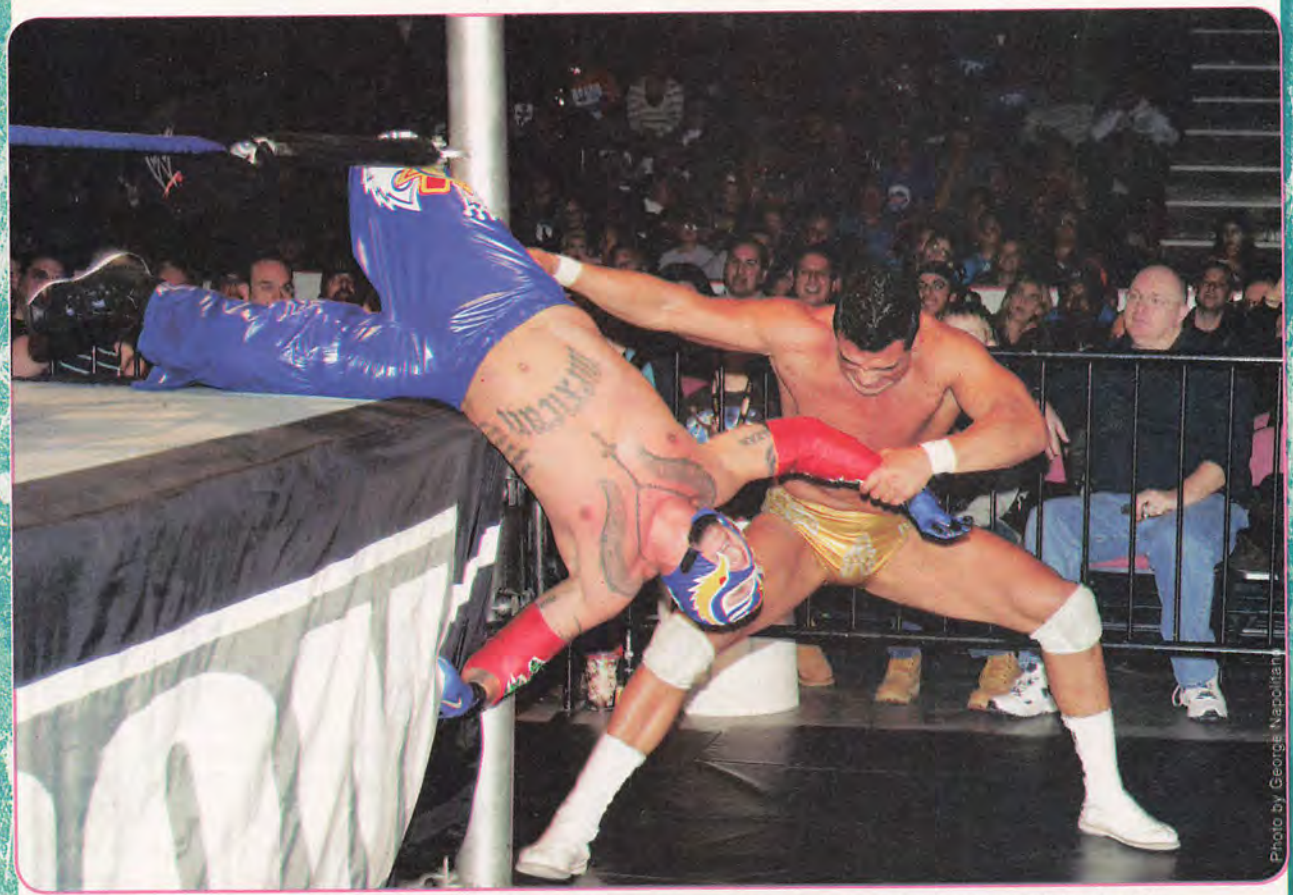

Photo by George Napolitano

Whether you like him or not, Alberto Del Rio has become a crucial member of the Smackdown brand, where he's been able to fine-tune his game outside the glare of the Raw spotlight.

OWN

Photo by George Napolitano

Cody Rhodes has taken full advantage of his time at Smackdown to pick up some experience, refine his character, and gather some important wins. His triumph over Rey Mysterio Jr. at WrestleMania may have been tainted, but it certainly contributed to his career momentum.

ings slip into the 1.9-2.0 range.

By Syfy standards, those ratings are considered strong, but compared to *Raw's* ratings, as well as the 3.0-ratings *Smackdown* fetched in the UPN days, the downward trend can't be denied.

However, ratings alone don't tell the whole story. WWE's ratings have dropped across the board since the boom period of the late-1990s, when *Smackdown* premiered. While hurt somewhat by the fact that the show is taped and not broadcast live (allowing fans to seek out spoilers online in advance), the post-production and editing capabilities available in that format usually allow *Smackdown* to air a tighter, better-produced show than *Raw*.

Smackdown has also allowed new stars to develop away from the hard spotlight of the live-TV Raw brand.

Consider Cody Rhodes. A year ago at this

Photo by George Napolitano

Rey Mysterio Jr. has been the subject of recent retirement rumors. Even with the ascent of Alberto Del Rio, Smackdown would miss Rey on a number of levels should he call it quits.

time, Rhodes split with his partner, Ted DiBiase Jr., and moved over to the Smackdown brand. While DiBiase has fizzled on Raw, Rhodes was able to develop a "dashing" new persona and reinvent himself, leading to the biggest win of his career over Rey Mysterio Jr. at WrestleMania 27. With the luxury of being pre-taped and with a smaller overall viewing audience, there is less pressure on younger performers. Verbal gaffes or miscues can be edited out, giving young talent an invaluable safety net.

Unfortunately for Smackdown, this has caused the brand to develop into a feeder system for Raw. Once a rising star begins to establish himself, he is often shipped over to the Raw brand (which is what happened to Dolph Ziggler just as he established himself as a World title contender), whereas stale and struggling wrestlers are moved to Smackdown to attempt to reinvent themselves.

This has created a unique dynamic on Smackdown, as veteran performers (such as Kane and Mysterio) are vying with fresh young talents (Rhodes and Alberto Del Rio), while Raw castoffs with a chip on their shoulder (such as Wade Barrett) fight for a new beginning.

While the Raw brand has a handful of wrestlers that have dominated the brand for the past few years (Orton, Cena, and Triple-H), the field is more wide-open on Smackdown, particularly with the retirement of edge. It is an exciting time for the brand, where there are endless opportunities for new stars to emerge, yet there are still plenty of veterans remaining that can put them to the test.

Kane is coming off a spectacular year, argu-

Former Intercontinental champions Kofi Kingston and Drew McIntyre are both young, exciting wrestlers that give Smackdown depth and flexibility. Both men can hold their own against mid-card and main-event caliber opponents.

ably the best of his career. He may be hearing the cheers from the fans today, but his inner monster can come out at any moment and he can go back to terrorizing the roster. The same goes for The Big Show. Today, he's a jolly giant, but Show has also been a rampaging rulebreaker with a mean streak a mile wide. If either of those two—or, heaven forbid—both of them decide to go back to their wicked ways, it could spell pain for the other roster members. Kingston, Mysterio, and the rest of the brand's fan favorites would have to raise their game to a new level, which is another reason Smackdown is so intriguing these days. There is a sense of uncertainty in the air.

Prior to WrestleMania, there were rampant rumors that Christian was ready to turn on his longtime friend, Edge, and attempt to cost him the World title. While that didn't happen, it shows that the fans aren't quite ready to fully trust "Captain Charisma." Christian will be an immediate World title contender if he chooses to go down that road, as would Kane and Big Show.

The faction to watch is The Corre. The Wade Barrett-led stable was embarrassed at WrestleMania and the following night on *Raw* when they foolishly attacked John Cena and The Rock. Barrett is a solid wrestler with World title potential. He doesn't take losses well, and he's very likely stewing over the fact that The Corre has not run roughshod over Smackdown the way his Nexus did over Raw last year. Barrett can be a very dangerous man when he's angry.

As the winner of the first Season of *NXT*, Barrett feels pressure to achieve and prove he deserves his spot. The Intercontinental champi-

Photo by Stu Saks

Kane may be hearing cheers these days, but the explosive psychopath that lurks just beneath the surface can appear at any moment. Drew McIntyre had better make sure he's not within striking distance when it does.

Photo by Stu Saks

Heath Slater and Justin Gabriel make serviceable WWE tag team champs, but they are much more valuable to Smackdown and WWE as members of The Corre, alongside Wade Barrett and Ezekiel Jackson.

onship is a notable accomplishment, but it is a marked step down from the WWE championship he had come so close to winning last year. Barrett still feels the need to prove himself, and with The Corre in his corner, he can make a major impact.

As for the rest of The Corre, Justin Gabriel and Heath Slater currently hold the tag team championship, though they have yet to fully hit their stride. The team has shown flashes of talent, but has proven to be anything but invincible, which can open up opportunities for tag teams on both the Smackdown and Raw rosters.

The most intriguing part of The Corre is Ezekiel Jackson. Jackson is one of the most physically imposing specimens in WWE history. He may be a bit rough around the edges, but his raw power and intensity make him a potential threat to any titleholder. With just a bit more seasoning, Jackson could emerge as a title contender. With the full backing of The Corre, Jackson could even be a dark horse candidate to become the WWE World champion by year's end.

The influx of fresh young talent comes at an ideal time for Smackdown, as the brand may be losing two of its all-time most popular stars. In recent months, both The Undertaker and Rey

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Smackdown fans of female wrestling must consider themselves fortunate that Michelle McCool and Beth Phoenix, two bedrocks of the Divas division, compete primarily on the blue brand.

Mysterio have been the subject of retirement rumors. The Undertaker has been only semi-active over the past few years, and Smackdown has survived without him, though the "Dead Man" can usually be counted upon to provide a ratings spike and some additional pay-per-view buys each year.

The more concerning potential loss is Mysterio, who broke wrestling's size boundaries once and for all. The two-time World champion is a thrilling in-ring performer and a versatile fixture for the Smackdown brand, able to compete on the main-event level as well as the mid-card. He is also the brand's most popular wrestler, especially among the youth demographic, which WWE has been heavily targeting over the past year.

WWE clearly has high hopes for newcomer Sin Cara, who is likely being groomed to fill Mysterio's role as WWE's resident charismatic masked uchador, but there is much more to Mysterio's appeal than his colorful masks and acrobatics. Mysterio is also a terrific promo man who comes across as sincere. If Sin Cara is indeed being groomed as an eventual replacement for Mysterio, he'll quickly have to learn to speak fluent English. Sin Cara debuted on the Raw brand, meaning Smackdown will be feeling Mysterio's absence regardless.

Mysterio has hinted at retirement in the past with nothing coming of it, so he may stay in WWE for years to come, but the speculation on his retirement is still an unsettling thought for the Smackdown brand.

Overall, Smackdown is healthy and vibrant, even if its current ratings don't reflect it. The roster mix ensures some fresh rivalries and exciting matches, and the potential defection of established stars—as well as WWE's practice of moving rising stars from Smackdown to Raw—creates opportunities for young wrestlers to quickly rise to the next level. The brand still has plenty of star quality and proven marquee names, and ratings are bound to rise as more fans discover how exciting the brand is.

Smackdown is in no position to surpass Raw as WWE's flagship brand, but it promises to present some captivating feuds, steadily gain viewers, and allow young competitors to grow into future superstars, which is exactly what it is intended to do.

—Dan Murphy

STATE OF TNA

The more things change in TNA, the more they stay the same. Just as in years past, TNA's identity as being a distant second to WWE seems to be etched in stone. Rapid growth is not impossible. Will this be the year TNA finally makes it happen?

LAST YEAR, MAJOR changes to the corporate landscape of the company teased huge changes on the horizon for TNA. Nobody knew exactly how the arrivals of Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff would affect TNA's destiny. As we have discovered over the past 12 months, they've barely had an effect at all. Ratings are stagnant and pay-per-view buy rates are reportedly not very healthy. And while both Hogan and Bischoff add star power to the televised product, neither has made much of a difference on the business side of things.

For better or worse, several other big-name players accompanied Hogan and Bischoff, and have stuck around long enough to make their mark.

Once the beggars and hangers-on (we're looking at you, Bubba the Love Sponge) and also-rans (see you later, Nasty Boys) used up their 15 minutes of faded glory, the true stars rose to prominence. Rob Van Dam and Mr. Anderson, in particular, were both given a chance to shine, which for those two must have been a welcome change from the glass ceiling they continually bumped their heads against in WWE.

Unfortunately, TNA's biggest stars have often come with some hefty baggage. Wrestlers with personal demons have often been rewarded or otherwise mishandled by TNA management, a fact that does nothing to enhance the company's image.

At press time, Jeff Hardy was being kept off of the active roster after showing up "in no shape to perform" for his main-event match at Victory Road. Combine that with Hardy's oft-delayed drug trafficking trial, and it would seem that TNA's association with the "Charismatic Enigma" has done TNA more harm than good. Meanwhile, Kurt Angle's domestic disputes and multiple arrests have further tarnished TNA's image, while Scott Hall's aborted comeback last year made TNA look misguided for giving him another chance in the big leagues at all.

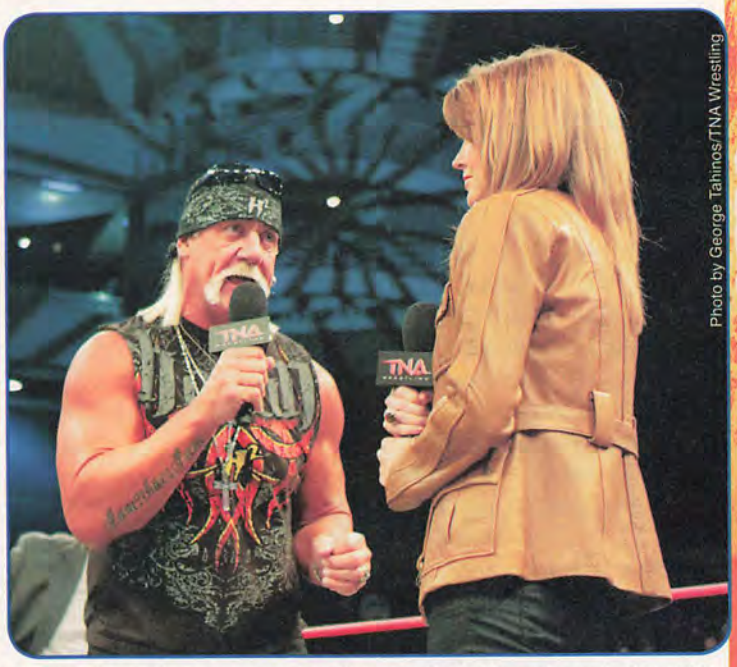


Photo by George Tahinos/TNA Wrestling

Though he adds a presence to *Impact*, Hulk Hogan's arrival in TNA has probably not affected the bottom line in a positive way as much as TNA President Dixie Carter would have hoped.

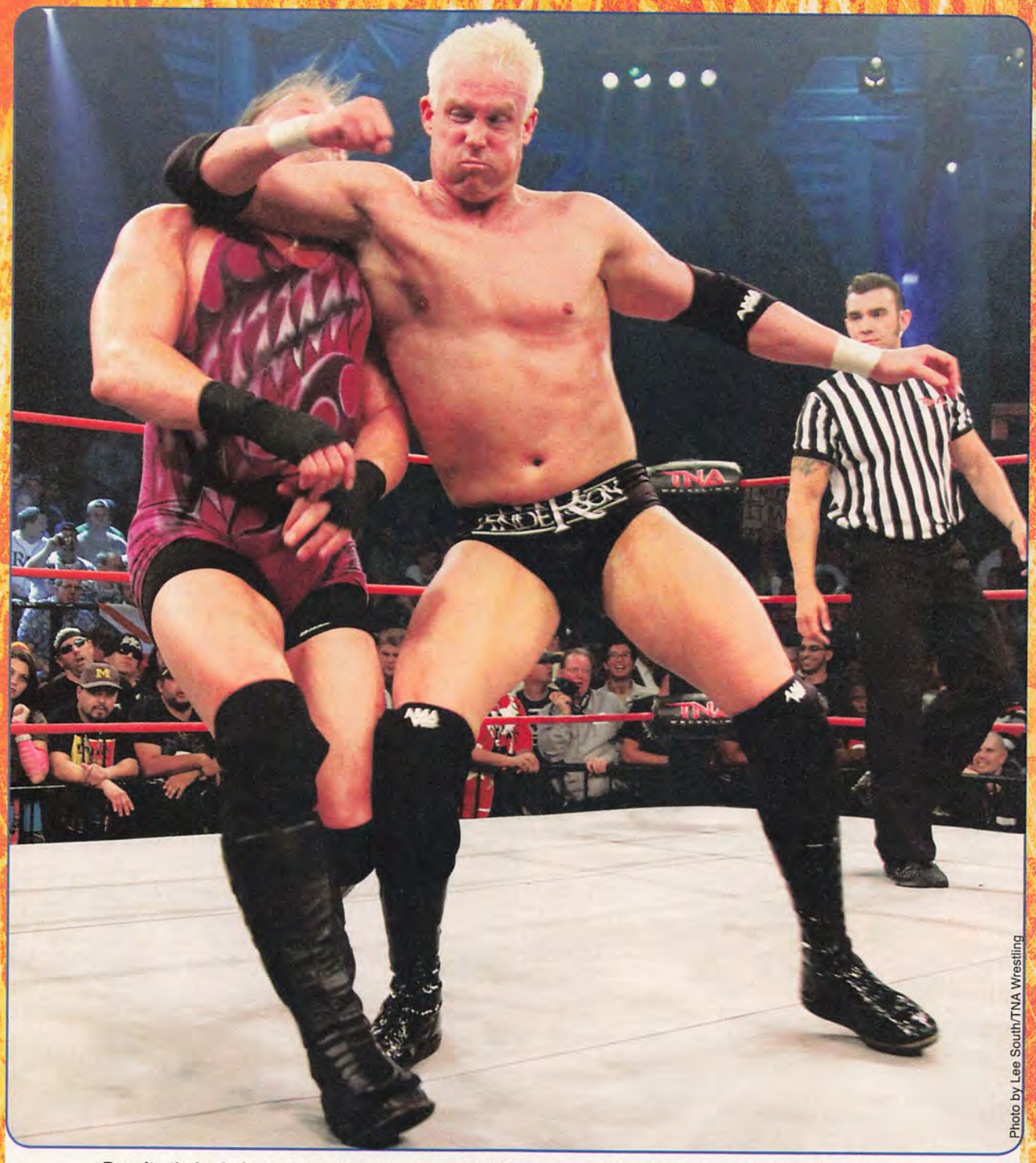


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Despite their obvious dislike for each other, Rob Van Dam and Ken Anderson have one thing in common: Neither man was given a fair chance to headline in WWE, and both are now flourishing in TNA.

As a former public relations professional, Dixie Carter understands that image is an important factor in any company's success. TNA is better off being perceived as a company that promotes dependable, healthy superstars … not a bunch of big names with one foot in rehab. Even if it costs them a big name or two, the people at TNA needs to be more selective in whom they choose to be the faces of their product.

Another venture that hasn't worked so well for TNA in recent times has been its celebrity guest appearances. After all of the internal hype surrounding the arrivals of *The Jersey Shore* cast members J-Woww and Angelina, WWE snatched up the more popular and well-known Snooki, rendering TNA's efforts second-rate.

The good news for TNA is that it doesn't actually need celebrities from other walks of life: It has one in Hulk Hogan. Doubt the "Hulkster's" mainstream appeal in 2011? Earlier this year, his surprise cameo on *American Idol* ignited the studio audi-

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Jeff Jarrett and Kurt Angle have become bitter enemies, and even though Angle is generally considered the better wrestler, their feud has been close, with Jarrett occasionally hitting The Stroke on Angle (above) and Angle snapping his anklelock on Jarrett (below).

ence like never before. He's still got it, and appearances on talk shows and other media outlets on behalf of TNA would promote the product to the masses just as effectively as any reality-show star could.

Speaking of which, this past year saw the arrival of *Shore* knockoffs Robbie E and Cookie. While both are experienced talents who cut their teeth for years on the independent level, their emphasis on style over substance moved the X division farther and farther from its original purpose, which was to showcase cutting-edge athleticism. Moving the gold to X division veteran Kazarian was a step in the right direction.

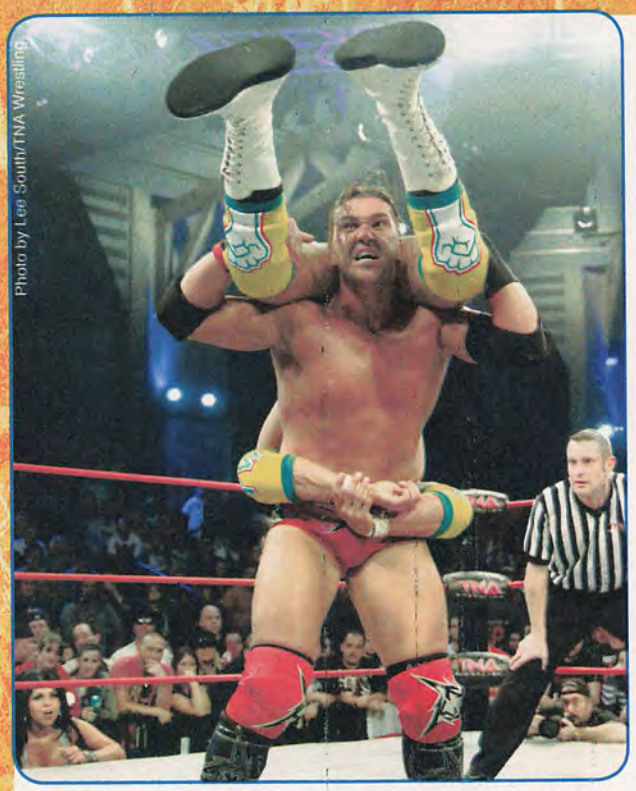
A similar reinvention is needed for the TV championship, a strap that seems to have no clear purpose whatsoever. Barely mentioned in the past few months, it was finally vacated from the then-injured Abyss, only to be won by Immortal's Gunner, who is well-known on the indy circuit as up-and-coming star Phill Shatter. In the coming year, TNA might be best served to scrap this title and focus on the others.

The Knockouts division continues to deliver. Much like the heyday of women's wrestling in '90s WWE, talented femmes like Mickie James, Angelina Love, and Madison Rayne combine beauty with legit-

e South/TNA Wrestling

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Matt Morgan and Hernandez may not carry the same name power as Sting and RVD, but they are both credible threats to win the TNA World title at some point.



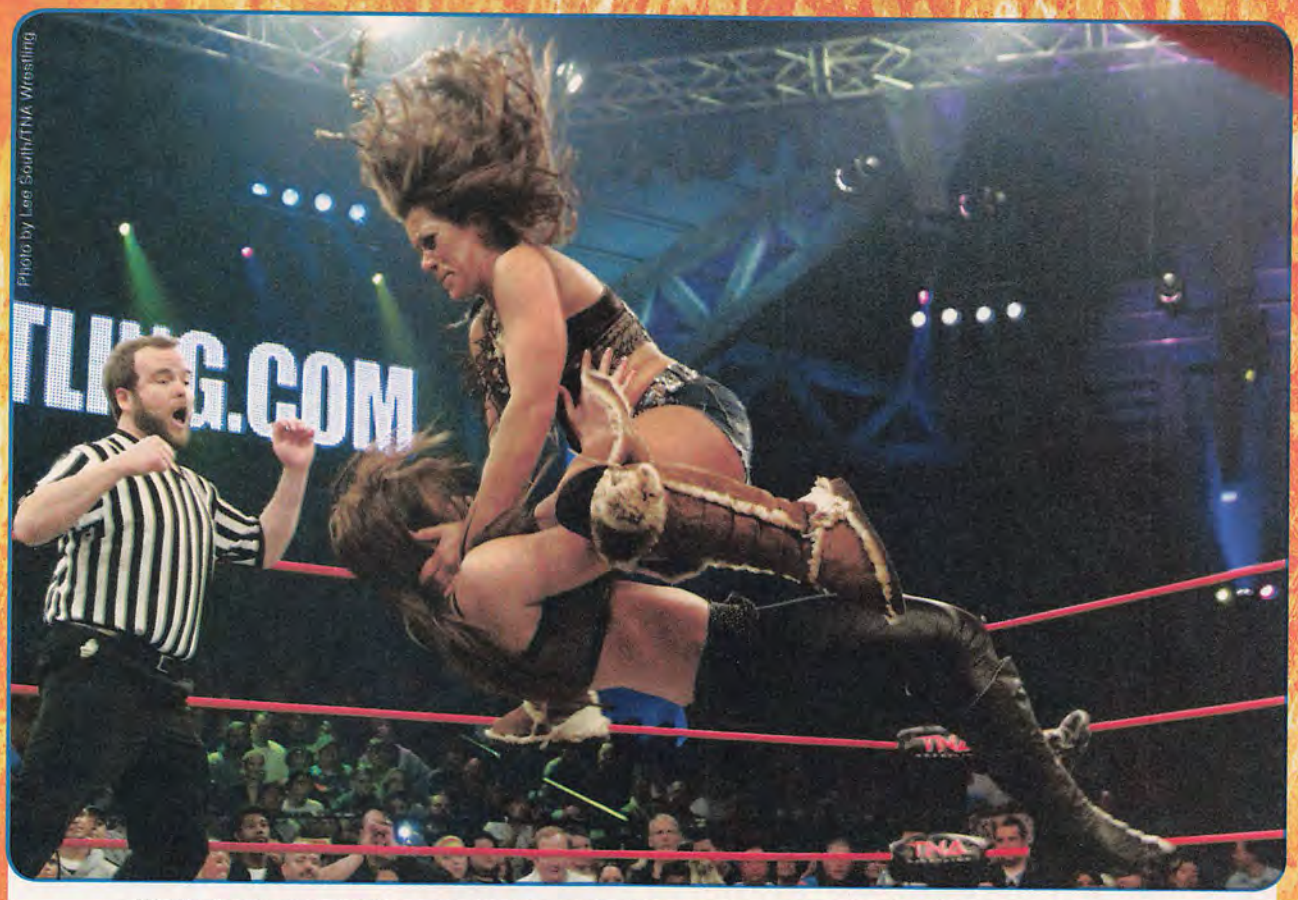
Kazarian and Robbie E are fine wrestlers who could thrive in any company. Unfortunately, they compete in TNA's X division, which is erratically booked and sometimes ignored completely.

imate wrestling ability. Velvet Sky continues to improve in the ring, while dependable veterans like Tara and Winter serve as the backbone of the roster.

The business side of privately owned TNA is far more difficult to assess than WWE, but common sense tells us that the company is paying a great deal more for its current roster than the one that was in place two years ago. That would be fine if the higher-priced talent were able to justify its existence with higher ratings, better pay-per-view buy rates, or lucrative licensing deals, but that hasn't happened yet. TNA's biggest successes have largely been accomplished by marketing the product outside of the United States, resulting in significant popularity in various parts of the world. International tours to England and other locales have been money-makers, while syndication deals in various countries have earned the company big ratings and bigger bucks.

Give TNA credit for its approach to live events (even if there are no numbers available to prove its success). Instead of competing with WWE in major arenas, TNA runs fan-friendly events in smaller buildings, thus creating a stronger bond with live audiences. While the WWE "Universe" gapes at their heroes from afar, TNA fans are invited to meet and greet their favorites via autograph sessions

TNA's strong suit is its tag team division, which features standout tandems such as Beer Money Inc., and The Motor City Machine Guns. TNA has an opportunity to brand itself as the go-to fed for strong tag team wrestling.



Mickie James and Madison Rayne have taken the spotlight from The Beautiful People in recent months, but rest assured Angelina Love, Velvet Sky, and now Winter, will not give up the spotlight for long. The remaining members of the deep KOs division will also be fighting for exposure.

before and after each house show. Select ticket holders are invited backstage, creating an interactive atmosphere that comes off much differently than a standard WWE event.

On the flip side, TNA's television product continues to flood viewers with a complicated mix of promos, backstage vignettes, and truncated matches. Mike Tenay and Taz have gelled to become an extremely capable broadcast duo, but even they are overmatched against the rush of images, sounds, and ideas that are put forth within a two-hour show or three-hour pay-per-view. Obviously, the challenge of fitting the majority of a full-sized roster into two hours of weekly television time is daunting, but with so little time allotted to all but a select few stars, barely anyone benefits. Perhaps a shift toward more supplemental programming on TNA's website might give the lower-card talent a proper chance to shine while giving *Impact* some breathing room.

One positive for TNA is its strength and depth of roster. While some wrestling fans are put off by the championship viability of its top six wrestlers, it has to be comforting to know that fans would accept Sting, RVD, Mr. Anderson, Kurt Angle, AJ Styles, or even Hernandez and Matt Morgan as credible World champions. The problems arise when the discussion turns to elevating young talent. Kazarian, the current X division champion, could just as easily be competing for the World title. Other cruiserweight types, such as Max and Jeremy Buck, Jay Lethal, and Christopher Daniels are athletic and exciting, but poorly promoted, misused, or simply overlooked. Samoa Joe, Styles, and D'Angelo Dinero are young, proven vets the fans are dying to embrace, yet they too have been inexplicably under-used.

Fortunately, TNA continues to feature strong tag team action on *Impact* and at pay-per-views, which helps the company stand out in an era that has de-emphasized tag team wrestling.

Beyond everything discussed thus far, what is the most important thing that TNA must do to maintain, improve, and grow in the coming year? Simply put: It needs to believe in itself. For nine years, TNA was proud to be the underdog. From the overuse of "edgy" language to the frenetic pacing of its TV shows, everything TNA has thrown at us has been a desperate plea for our attention. That needs to stop immediately.

TNA has all the tools, all the talent, and all the potential to become bigger and better than ever in the months ahead. TNA is not WWE, but what's wrong with that?

—Gerry Strauss

STATE OF

RING OF

Although it is still considered the number-three wrestling promotion in the United States, Ring of Honor, in its ninth year, finds itself on considerably shakier footing than it did 12 months ago. With a shortfall of homegrown potential main-eventers and no television platform to grow its product, there is ample reason to be concerned for the future of the company

IN JANUARY, Ring of Honor announced that its two-year televised run on HDNet was coming to an end, as the Mark Cuban-owned cable network had decided not to renew its deal. Despite ROH officials' best efforts to convince the world that the effect would negligible, the loss of a national TV show was unquestionably a severe blow.

ROH officials remain positive that they can find a new television home, but it is unlikely that the Philadelphia-based company will strike a partnership as beneficial as the one it had with HDNet, which subsidized all its TV tapings, paid the salary of well-regarded producer and former WWE Smackdown writer Dave Lagana, and substantially upgraded ROH's overall production.

Without a television home, ROH is left to promote its product exclusively through its online presence. That may be enough for ROH die-hards, but it is unlikely ROH will be able to reach many new fans and convince them to buy DVDs or tickets through Youtube videos.

The collapse of ROH's TV deal comes at a time when the company could afford it least. A weak economy has even WWE struggling to sell DVDs and tickets. In the past, ROH had been able to ride out financial obstacles and stay relevant by promoting itself as a no-nonsense wrestling company that put a premium on athleticism. But other high-profile independent wrestling leagues, such as Dragon Gate USA, have cut into that market.

So what's left for ROH? The successes of wrestlers like Daniel Bryan and CM Punk may send the message to fans that ROH is the place to go to watch tomorrow's stars today. But looking around the ROH lockerroom, there appear to be fewer of those future world champions than ever before.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Like Rod Strong before him, new heavyweight champion Eddie Edwards possesses a well-rounded repertoire, but some say he, like Strong, lacks the flash to be ROH's standard-bearer.

ROH took some serious hits to its talent roster over the past 12 months with the departure of Tyler Black, who is now working in WWE's developmental system as Seth Rollins, and the releases of two-time ROH heavyweight champion Austin Aries and

HONOR

perennial main-eventer Kevin Steen.

With few options, ROH has relied on some unlikely candidates to fill out the top of its cards. Eddie Edwards, largely a mid-card competitor for ROH in recent years, scored a major upset when he defeated Roderick Strong in March to capture the ROH championship.

In Edwards, ROH has as its champion a young, largely homegrown talent with tremendous spirit and a considerable upside. But during better times, his shortcomings may have been enough to disqualify him from heavyweight title contention. Although above average in several categories, Edwards has shown himself to be exceptional in none. His look and speaking skills are bland, and his ring style is exciting, but generic.

Still, he may be a slightly better option than his predecessor, Strong, who appeared to have been given a heavyweight title run only because the company was short on options. The ROH veteran is hard-hitting and thrilling in the ring, but does not have the size nor speaking ability to ever become a breakout star.

ROH has fleshed out its main-event scene with Homicide and Christopher Daniels, both of whom returned to the company after being

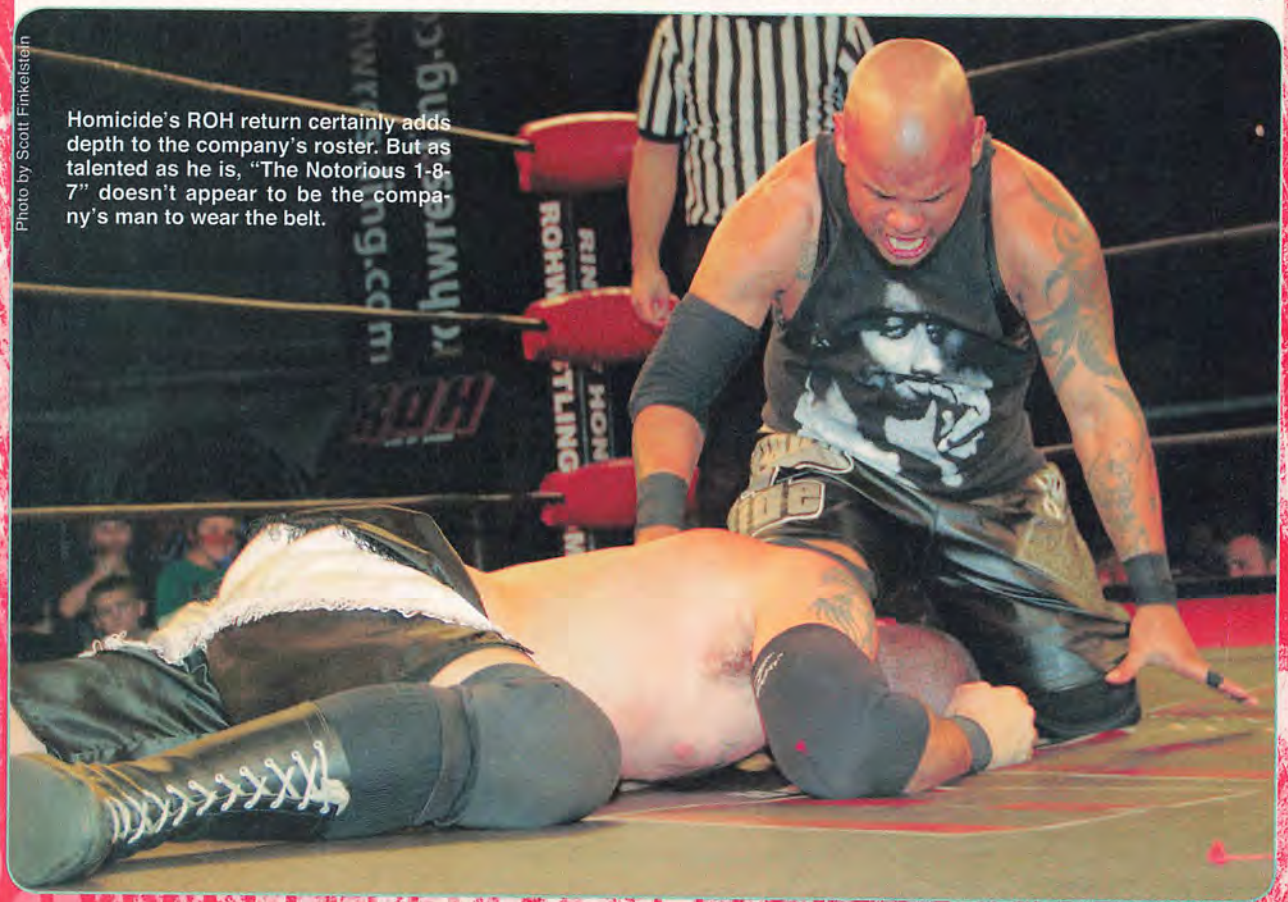


Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Homicide's ROH return certainly adds depth to the company's roster. But as talented as he is, "The Notorious 1-8-7" doesn't appear to be the company's man to wear the belt.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

The Kings of Wrestling currently sit atop ROH's impressive tag team division. However, the Kings and several other ROH tandems are at risk of being split up as ROH looks to fortify its thinning upper-card singles ranks.

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Davey Richards is considered by some to be the best overall wrestler in Ring of Honor. In fact, fans often chant, "best in the world!" during his matches. Hopefully, ROH can leverage his popularity and credibility to land another national TV deal.

released by TNA. While both bring a wealth of experience and skill, neither of the two wrestlers are seen by fans as the future of ROH.

The closest thing to a breakout star that ROH has on its roster may be Davey Richards, the explosive Washington native who has inherited from Bryan ROH fans' chants of "best in the world." With a foundation in Muy Thai and Brazilian jiu jitsu, Richards brings an air of legitimacy to his arsenal that few others possess. And it's likely a matter of "when" rather than "if" he'll become ROH champion. A championship clash between Richards and his longtime partner, Edwards, may be the biggest match ROH can deliver this year.

But investing in Richards in the long-term may be something of a gamble, given his questionable commitment to pro wrestling in the past. Last year, he vowed to leave the sport for good to pursue other interests, before having a change of heart.

ROH's upper-mid-card singles division is rounded out by comedic cult hero El Generico and aging former champion

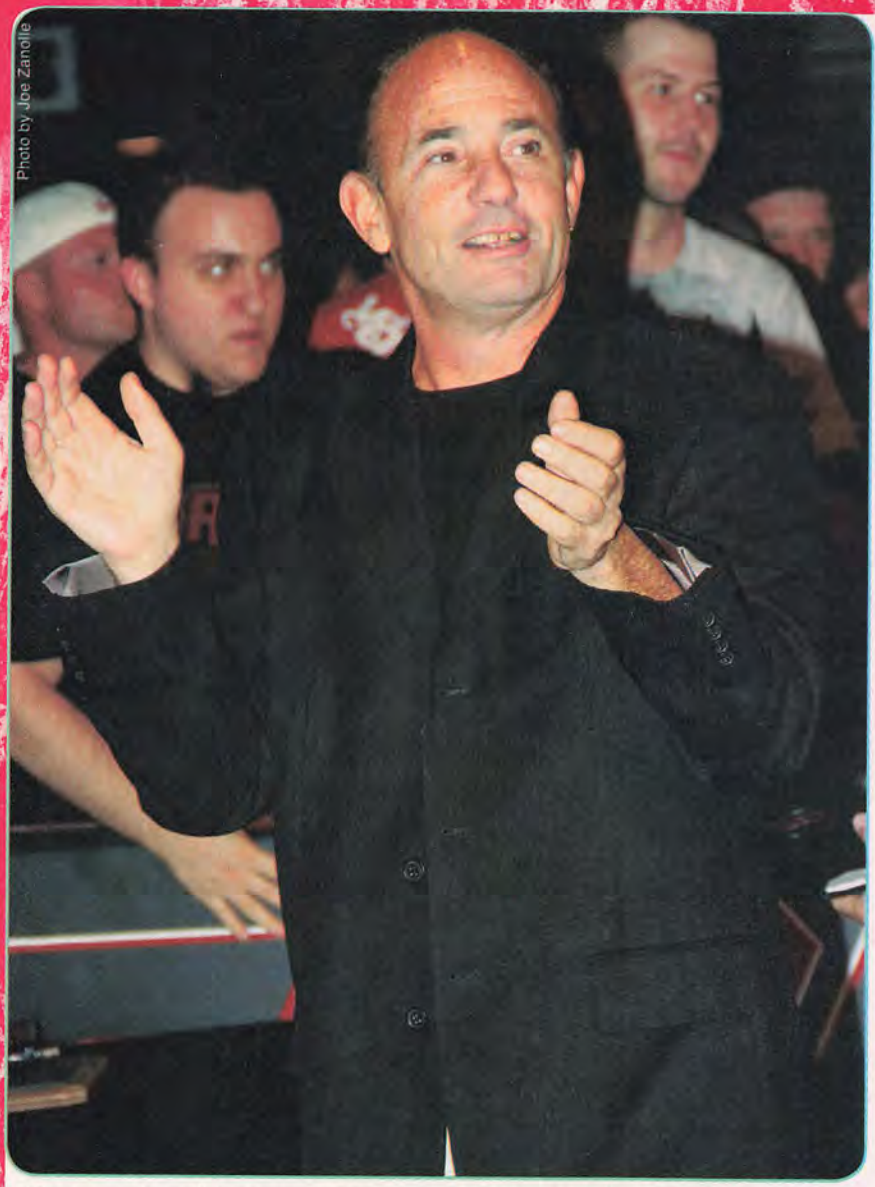


Photo by Joe Zanolle

ROH owner Cary Silkin may prefer running his company like a family business, but the pressures confronting Ring of Honor may soon compel him to seek an infusion of cash from a corporate investor.

Steve Corino. Below them, the quality of competitors ranges from the promising Mike Bennett to versatileKyle O'Reilly.

ROH has raised the stakes in its mid-card with the introduction of a secondary championship, the TV title, which is currently held by Daniels. Unfortunately, with no television presence to speak of, the fate of the title is up in the air.

The greatest strength of ROH's roster is its tag team division, which features several world-class tandems who can consistently be relied upon to deliver a quality main event. Atop the division are tag team champions Claudio Castagnoli and Chris Hero. As of press time The Kings of Wrestling are enjoying the longest title reign in company history, at about a year. During that time, the Kings have competed in some of ROH's most critically acclaimed bouts in recent memory.

The loaded tag division also includes perennial title contenders The Briscoe Brothers, the up-and-coming All Night Express of Rhett Titus and Kenny King, and internationally acclaimed former WWE tag team champions Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas. Also, Richards and Edwards still occasionally team together as the highly popular American Wolves.

Unfortunately, the salvation of ROH's weak singles division may require the decimation of its tag team division, as many of the company's most promising competitors are currently being used in duos.

But before ROH makes any major talent decisions, it would be best served to rethink its business model, which relies on DVD sales as the company's main revenue source. ROH has a little more money coming in through its semi-regular Internet pay-per-views, but that may be negligible considering the costs of keeping a wrestling company afloat.

ROH owner Cary Silkin has wisely sought to cut some costs by running shows only in the strongest markets and by parting ways with some expensive talent. But for ROH to survive another year, the company needs to make more money, not just spend less.

Doing so may require a step that ROH's owners have been reluctant to take so far—relinquishing a considerable amount of control, or even ownership, to an outside investor. Such a deal could be similar to that made in TNA when the Jarrett family sold most of its interests to Panda Energy. A partnership with a corporation with deep pockets and vast resources could open the door to a new television contract, first-class production standards, commercial sponsorships, licensing deals, and all the other revenue streams that are essential for ROH to take the critical next step in its national expansion.

Even if Silkin were ready to make that step, the next one might be even harder: finding that investor.

—Al Castle

STATE OF INDEPEN

The most notable trend to emerge on the independent scene over the past year—and one that many promoters are already heralding as a potentially revolutionary concept within the industry—is the widespread utilization of Internet Pay-Per-View

Gofightlive.TV works with independent wrestling groups to promote their events through Internet Pay-Per-View. iPPV has become a growing trend among indy organizations over the past year.

BETTER KNOWN AS iPPV, Internet Pay-Per-View technology provides an outlet for companies to stream events at a relatively low cost, either on their own websites or through a third-party carrier.

Top independents such as Ring of Honor and Dragon Gate USA have been at the forefront of this movement. But, keeping pace have been a surprising number of smaller promotions, each looking to take advantage of the extra revenue and exposure this method of promotion offers—not to mention an ability to create repeat business that does not necessarily depend on local (or region-specific) support.

Some see iPPV as not just a means to improve business, but as the very future of the industry.

"Live iPPV is the future," stated Gabe Sapolsky, vice president of DGUSA and owner of EVOLVE, in a recent blog on heymanhustle.craveonline.com.

DGUSA went live on iPPV on April 2 via the company's own WWNLive. "The fact that we have brought iPPV in house [rather than use an online distributor like gofightlive.tv] has opened up a whole new universe of possibilities, said Sapolsky. "This is just the beginning of what we can create."

Sapolsky noted the importance of forward thinking and the benefits of understanding how to take advantage of new avenues in technology.

"I remember when Paul Heyman first brought up the Cyberslam concept in ECW in 1996," he said. "A bunch of fans from around the country were buying tickets to our event at the ECW Arena. They all came together on this new sensation called the Internet. The result was a hugely successful event that was profitable for ECW, built the brand, and was memorable for all the fans in attendance.

"The lesson: Be at the forefront of technology and what's hot."

More and more smaller promotions are heeding that lesson. For example, Illinois-based DREAMWAVE ran its first show, Season Premiere, using this format in February. According to owner Jay Repsel, the outing was an overwhelming success.

"We took a risk in February with the iPPV and it paid off," said Repsel. "We got great feedback on the talent and the quality of the show. We are confident that each time we dive into iPPV, we will get better and better.

"It was a nerve-wracking day," Repsel continued. "It was our first attempt at an iPPV and you could definitely feel that day was different than other event days. It did work out in the end, as we had people from three different countries outside the United States order the event on iPPV. That was a real shot in the arm. To think people on the other side of the world watched us perform is truly inspirational. We definitely have a way to go to get to where we want to be, but that showed us we are moving in the right direction."

While Ring of Honor is still widely considered the top indy group in the nation, its hardships—losing its national outlet on HDNet, as well as some of its top

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talent—have been no secret. At one point, ROH was forced to initiate several well-publicized cost-cutting measures, which included parting ways with stalwarts Austin Aries and Kevin Steen *(for more info, see "State Of ROH" on page 44)*.

DGUSA is considered to be a short step behind ROH by most observers, but the progressive brainchild of Sapolsky, president Satoshi Oji, and COO Sal Hamaoui is gaining steam (due in part to the company's foray into the iPPV realm). An offshoot of the popular Japanese promotion of the same name, the two-year-old company has expanded from its base in Philadelphia to produce PPVs in New York, Chicago, and Milwaukee, and also made its debut in Ontario, Canada, within the past year.

With the presentation of a fast-paced, hard-hitting style, DGUSA quickly carved its own niche. The promotion features regular Dragon Gate stars such as current Open the Freedom Gate champion BxB Hulk, Naruki Doi, Masato Yoshino, and Dragon Kid, along with a mix of North American indy regulars. DGUSA crowned its first ever Open the United Gate

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Claudio Castagnoli (holding belt, second from left) has been busy in recent times. Not only does he compete in CHIKARA's Bruderschaft des Kreuzes heel stable, he also hold Pro Wrestling Guerilla's heavyweight title.

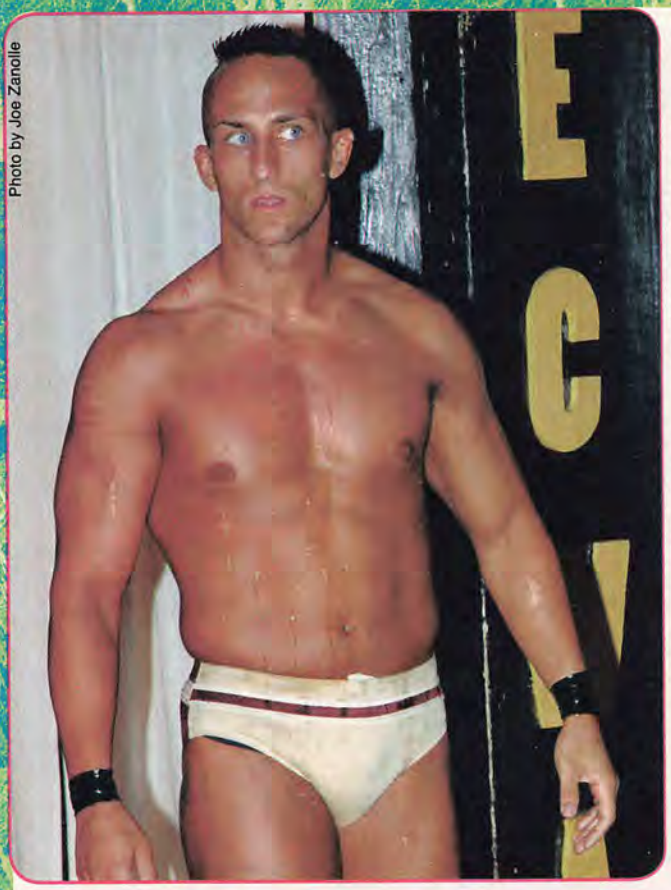


Photo by Joe Zanolle

Perennial ECWA Super 8 entrant Tommaso Ciampa was once again part of the action at the 2011 tournament, which was held outside of Delaware for the first time ever. This year's event took place at Tri-State Wrestling's Flyers Skate Zone in Voorhees, New Jersey.

(tag team) champions in January, with Yoshino and PAC winning a tournament to take the honors.

EVOLVE, Sapolsky and Hamaoui's other project, has, well, "evolved" more methodically than some have expected, having run only seven shows since beginning operations in January of 2010. The promotion's unique implementation of structured singles, tag team, and women's divisions and emphasis on rules and win-loss records has, nonetheless, made each of its events notable.

Speculation persists that EVOLVE will announce plans for a championship tournament during the second-half of 2011. Meanwhile, CHIKARA, which was founded in 2002, is officially in the process of crowning its first-ever singles champion.

Los Angeles-based Pro Wrestling Guerrilla is unchallenged as the West Coast's top independent. Often compared to Philadelphia-based CHIKARA, due to the fact that both companies feature a combination of action and comedy, PWG draws some of the top names in the indies and often features legends such as "Rowdy" Roddy Piper and Terry Funk on its cards.

The National Wrestling Alliance retains a substantial presence in the indies with multiple regional promotions in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico claiming affiliation under its banner.

The NWA heavyweight title still projects a certain mystique, thanks to its prestigious lineage. Recently, veteran Colt Cabana won the championship from "Scrap Iron" Adam Pearce. Cabana has already begun fielding challenges from a wide array of contenders. Other top NWA performers include National heavyweight champion Chance Prophet, who ended Phill Shatter's two-year reign back in February, North American champion The Sheik, and junior heavyweight titleholder Craig Classic.

Last September, the alliance debuted *NWA Championship Wrestling From Hollywood*, a weekly television series that originates from KDOC-TV in Los Angeles. After airing, each episode is uploaded to YouTube; this outlet has provided a means of mass exposure to the NWA and its rising stars.

Combat Zone Wrestling, another Philadelphia-based company, continues to satisfy the niche for hardcore wrestling. However, since taking over the now-12-year-old promotion from founder John Zandig in 2009, DJ Hyde has placed an emphasis on the diversity of the CZW roster and has showcased a wider variety of styles.

The same can be said for Jersey All Pro Wrestling, owned and operated by "Fat" Frank Iadeavia. Founded two years before CZW, JAPW is one of the longest, successfully run indy companies going today.

Of course, the top honor in that category goes to the East Coast Wrestling Association, which was founded way back in 1967 by Jim Kettner. After running the promotion with great pride for more than four decades, Kettner sold the company to Mike Tartaglia in 2010.

Tartaglia, who also runs the revived Tri-State Wrestling Alliance, has kept the two entities separate, though there has been some crossover between the two. For the first time, in 2011, the highly regarded ECWA Super 8 Tournament was held outside of Delaware, as it was hosted in TWA's home base of Voorhees, New Jersey.

Held annually since 1997, the Super 8 has helped launch the careers of many future stars, including Christopher Daniels, Low Ki, Paul London, and Davey Richards. The tournament was to be showcased for the first time this year on (you guessed it) iPPV.

Joe Zanolle, who works as booker for both ECWA and TWA, offered his thoughts on the general state of independent wrestling.

"The state of today's independent wrestling depends on where you are located geographically," he said. "If you are in an area where there is not much live entertainment, you have a greater chance of drawing a better crowd. In the northeastern area, there are so many promotions and shows and the

Photo by Frank Krewda

With the formation of Arenachicks, Amber O'Neal (third from right) has tossed her hat in to independent female wrestling promotional ring. The company has just released its first DVD and has a comic book series in the works.

fans have more choices, which is great for fans, but it also divides the potential fans base.

"This makes it tougher to draw crowds, although the size of a crowd is only a superficial indicator of success. You can draw 1,500 people but lose money if you have to pay, say, a Jeff Hardy or MVP. On the other hand, you can draw 200 people and make money if you have minimal overhead expenses. It is a balancing act between revenue and overhead costs."

Although it serves as WWE's official developmental affiliate, and may not be a truly independent promotion in the traditional sense, Florida Championship Wrestling still qualifies as an indy group for the purpose of this analysis.

Over the past year, FCW has sent an assortment of talent to WWE for competition on *NXT*. This has produced mixed results, with Season One winner Wade Barrett and fellow Corre members and current WWE tag team champions Heath Slater and Justin Gabriel heading the pack.

Only time will tell what impact the reboot of *Tough Enough* and the naming of Triple-H as the new man in charge of developmental operations will have on the FCW-*NXT* dynamic.

Meanwhile, WWE's former developmental affiliate, Ohio Valley Wrestling, continues to do solid business on its own while running weekly TV in Louisville, Kentucky.

Women's wrestling is also more than alive and well on the indies, with SHIMMER, ChickFight, and Women Superstars Uncensored among the most notable all-female companies in operation. Each of the aforementioned benefits from affiliations with other promotions.

SHIMMER is a sister promotion of ROH, and features an all-star roster of female talent on every show. Current champion Madison Eagles, Mercedes Martinez, Sara Del Rey, Daizee Haze, and MsChif are just a few of the names on the Illinois-based company's active roster.

WSU, boasts a working agreement with DGUSA and an affiliation with National Wrestling Superstars, and was the first all-female promotion to step into the iPPV ring, having debuted on gofightlive.tv back in November.

San Francisco-based ChickFight, which began as an eight-woman tournament in 2004 and evolved into its own promotion, often runs cards in conjunction with Pro Wrestling Revolution.

Arenachicks, a North Carolina-based group run by Amber O'Neal that features Angel Orsini, Melissa Coates, April Hunter, and Jessicka Havok, among others, recently released its first DVD, and is looking to make its own unique mark on the female independent scene.

—Al Alven

STATE OF INTERNA

Economic and societal issues in Japan and Mexico have arisen as the latest challenge to an otherwise stable industry. At the same time, U.S. promotions continue to make inroads overseas

Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

IWGP heavyweight champion Hiroshi Tanahashi, shown wrestling Satoshi Kojima, defeated 2011 J-Cup winner Yuji Nagata. Despite the slow Japanese economy and the recent disaster, New Japan has seen an uptick in attendance and revenue.

THE FULL IMPACT of the natural disaster that devastated Japan will not be known for months or even years. But it is safe to say the catastrophe will affect all Japanese businesses in some way, and that includes the wrestling business.

On the economic side, most promotions had to cancel shows scheduled for the northern part of the main island of Honshu. At the time the earthquake hit, All Japan, for example, was in the midst of a tour scheduled to take its talent through the northeastern city of Sendai, which was in the hardest-hit area *(see "Straight Shooter," page 114)*. The entire tour had to be scrapped. Likewise, Dragon Gate had to cancel a tour, and the disaster has impacted scheduled dates for New Japan and Pro Wrestling NOAH as well.

This disaster is yet another challenge for a Japanese economy that has struggled mightily in the global recession of the past few years. The wrestling business surely felt the pinch, yet there were signs of recovery in 2010 and early-2011, as the main promotions saw overall revenues and attendance increase from the previous year. In fact, New Japan's annual Tokyo Dome show drew 42,000 fans, its highest number in eight years.

What economic impact will the disaster have on Japanese wrestling in the long-term? It's way too early to speculate. But in the meantime, many promotions are getting back to business in the ring. In one of the first major shows after the

TIONAL

disaster, Yuji Nagata won the finals of the annual New Japan Cup to capture the first-place prize for the second time. In so doing, Nagata won an automatic IWGP heavyweight championship title shot at his former GHC tag team championship partner, Hiroshi Tanahashi, who won his fifth IWGP title early this year, from Satoshi Kojima.

Over in All Japan, after a largely failed experiment to promote Ryota Hama as the centerpiece of the company, the group has turned to its more proven performers for stability. As of press time, Suwama's second Triple Crown heavyweight championship reign had already surpassed Stan Hansen's longest reign (211 days) on the all-time list of longest Triple Crown runs. Augmenting his string of excellent title defenses, Suwama also captured the annual Tokyo Sports Grand Prix' Performance award for 2010.

Suwama, however, still has a long way to go before approaching Takashi Sugiura's run of dominance in Pro Wrestling NOAH. In the wake of Mitsuharu Misawa's untimely death in June 2009, NOAH has leaned more heavily than ever on Sugiura to uphold the promotion's reputation for showcasing legitimate toughness and multifaceted fighting styles. In his first reign, Sugiura easily surpassed the one-year mark as GHC champ—a considerable feat in the era of short reigns.

While the Japanese wrestling promotions are seeking ways to get back to normality following

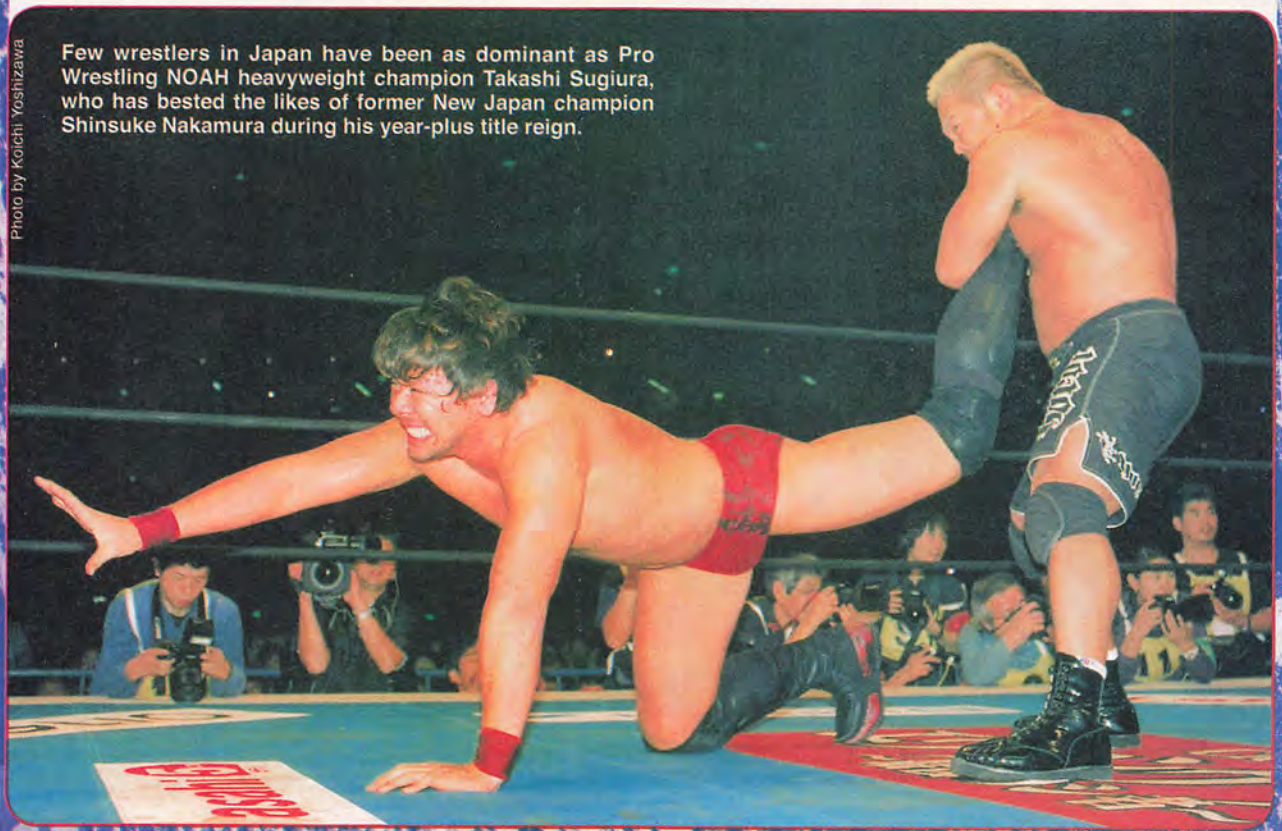


Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

Few wrestlers in Japan have been as dominant as Pro Wrestling NOAH heavyweight champion Takashi Sugiura, who has bested the likes of former New Japan champion Shinsuke Nakamura during his year-plus title reign.

Photo by Rob Myers

Mexico's super-popular Dr. Wagner Jr. remains not just a top-shelf wrestler in AAA, but he also plays a strong role as a cultural icon who has called for an end to the violent crime plaguing Mexico in recent times.

the catastrophe, Mexico's promotions spent much of the past year trying to keep wrestlers and fans safe from the violence that has plagued traditional lucha libre hotbeds.

Nine of Mexico's 31 states, including the area surrounding Mexico City, have experienced epidemic levels of violent crime. There have been several lucha libre shows interrupted or delayed because of inadequate security or reports of potential violence.

Neither AAA nor CMLL experienced a significant drop-off in attendance over the past year, but the concern over averting tragedy spurred the two promotions to respond publicly. The rival promotions have cooperated in discussing strategies to ensure the safety of performers and fans with some of the biggest stars, including Dr. Wagner Jr., who appealed for common sense to prevail.

On the business end, CMLL has been formulating strategies to cope with the departure of its top star, Mistico, to the WWE (where he is now known as Sin Cara). WWE even held a press conference in Mexico City to announce the signing. CMLL has been trying to elevate other stars to the status enjoyed by Mistico and CMLL heavyweight champion Ultimo Guerrero, but none have established themselves at a similar level quite yet.

Though most of his matches have been in defense of the NWA heavyweight title in the U.S., Adam Pearce has also reigned as NWA U.K. British Commonwealth champion since January 2010.

CMLL also experienced turbulence over the use in Mexico of the National Wrestling Alliance name for promotional purposes. Last March, a video was posted in which NWA Executive Director Robert Trobich declared that CMLL, its former affiliate, had been using the trademarked NWA name without permission in recent years. Trobich emphasized that the NWA recognized NWA Mexico (represented by champion Blue Demon Jr.) as its exclusive lucha libre affiliate, and threatened to take legal action if CMLL continued to use the NWA name and logo.

In AAA, the feud between Dr. Wagner Jr. and El Zorro has done solid box office and dominated recent storylines. El Zorro scored an upset victory for the AAA heavyweight championship due to outside interference from his La Sociedad cohorts, elevating the feud to an even hotter level as Wagner vowed revenge. More recently, El Zorro signed a non-exclusive contract with TNA that will let him compete in both TNA and AAA.

In Puerto Rico, neither the World Wrestling Council nor the International Wrestling Association had banner years. WWC was hoping for more of a boost following the return of Carly Colon (formerly Carlito) from WWE. Prior to his WWE release, Carlito's periodic appearances on WWC's biggest shows had often meant significant but temporary spikes in attendance. Carlito's recent feud with Ricky Banderas for the Universal heavyweight championship—which saw Banderas turn on Colon and then defeat him for the championship—has not been as lucrative as WWC had hoped.

In the meantime, WWC experienced significant defections when the team of Thunder and Lightning announced that it was returning to the IWA, and then hinted at luring Banderas to IWA after a two-year absence. IWA's revenues have been as flat as WWC's, although the recent feud between Escobar and emerging young star Dennis Rivera has been well received *(see "International Report" page 128)*.

Across the Atlantic in Europe, some major British independents, such as All Star Wrestling, Frontier Wrestling, International Pro Wrestling: U.K., and Real Quality Wrestling continued to draw moderate support, but most of the wrestling news in the past year has centered on WWE tours, with the company doing brisk business in the U.K. and Germany in particular. Early in 2011, TNA embarked on a tour of England, Scotland, Ireland, France, and Germany, to mixed reviews.

The competition for fans in the British Isles and Ireland in particular has been part of the reason for the increased use of legitimate English-, Scottish-, and Irish-trained wrestlers on the WWE and TNA rosters the past few years. For example, when WWE promoted its most recent European tour, the company enlisted Wade Barrett to appear at meet-and-greet events in London, Manchester, and Munich, Germany.

There was some sad news out of the NWA U.K. earlier this year when it was reported that promoter Andre Baker had committed suicide at age 45. Also, Adam Pearce remains the NWA British Commonwealth champion, a distinction he has held since January 2010.

—Bill Meltzer

STATE OF

THE STARS

Any evaluation of the state of wrestling must include an appraisal of the state of its biggest stars. After all, more than any other factor, it is the stars that affect the direction of the wrestling industry because it is the stars that the fans pay to see

WE IDENTIFIED 15 of wrestling's top stars and examined where each wrestler is at this stage of his or her career. In some cases, we tried to predict what lies ahead. In other cases, we offered advice. In every case, we took an objective look at each competitor and offered our insight.

It is interesting to note that most of the wrestlers we chose to feature are veteran competitors, including six (Undertaker, Triple-H, Jeff Jarrett, Edge, Kurt Angle, and Sting) who have been wrestling for more than 15 years. Despite the so-called "youth movement" in WWE over the past year, both WWE and TNA are still relying heavily on their veterans to carry the load as the new generation of superstars emerges.

Wrestlers reviewed in last year's State of the Stars section who were dropped from consideration this year included Chris Jericho, Tyler Black, D'Angelo Dinero, Jack Swagger, AJ Styles, and Abyss). Those wrestlers took a back seat in 2010, while veterans like Sting and The Undertaker reasserted their dominance.

While the average age of the stars we profiled may have gone up a little bit this year, the cumulative star power has increased even more. These are the wrestlers who are driving the business in 2011, and they're taking wrestling to new heights.

JOHN CENA

John Cena has a bad habit of making enemies, and his divisive personality is keeping him away from the WWE championship.

Last year, Cena found himself the target of The Nexus because the former *NXT* contestants saw him as a symbol of the power structure that was trying to keep them down. The ensuing feud kept Cena out of the title picture for nearly six months. This year, The Rock has taken issue with Cena, and "The Great One" singlehandedly cost Cena any chance to win the WWE title from The Miz at WrestleMania.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

Though John Cena enjoys the support of many fans, he still has his detractors. As 2011 unfolds, Cena must step beyond the scrubbed-up do-good image he portrays to convince his critics that he deserves respect as a wrestler.

Cena is still WWE's top star, but the backlash against him continues to spread. It's time for Cena to react, and not by cutting a rapping promo with risqué double-entendres. For the past two years, people have been targeting Cena, and Cena has come back with weak responses. Even when he's angry, he cracks lame jokes and clowns around. Cena needs to prove that he can be serious when need be.

Against The Rock, Cena has everything at stake. He's not just fighting an opponent; his manhood and his legacy are being challenged. In order for Cena

to finally silence his critics and prove that he's good enough to go toe-to-toe with one of the most lauded competitors of all-time, he needs to respond with a disproportionately violent attack on The Rock, even if it means a long run as a heel.

Cena has the opportunity to prove that he truly deserves his spot as the poster boy for WWE, but he needs to make a statement. Hustle, loyalty, and respect have taken him far, but now it's time for him to prove he has a killer instinct, too. Otherwise, he's in for a rough year.

The Miz gets results in the ring, but how he gets them leaves much to be desired. Some clean title defenses against more of WWE's top wrestlers would help his image immeasurably.

THE MIZ

When it comes to The Miz, there seem to be two schools of thought: Either he is one of the fastest rising stars in WWE history, or he is the least deserving world champion since David Arquette.

Naturally, the truth lies somewhere between those two extremes. Miz has been on quite a run, winning the tag team title, the U.S. title, Money in the Bank, and the WWE championship. Personality-wise, he fits right in as WWE champion. He is comfortable with the title belt around his waist and a microphone in his face, and he has emerged as a bona fide main-event attraction. Yet somehow, despite getting results, Miz does very little to actually impress in the ring.

Miz has relied on outside interference and cheating to keep his championship. He has very few clean and decisive victories over legitimate challengers. Despite all his bravado, Miz' reign has tarnished the WWE championship. He holds the most prestigious championship in the world, yet had to rely on underhanded tactics to defeat the 61-year-old Jerry Lawler.

Miz apologists may be tempted to compare him to the Ric Flair of the 1980s. Like Miz, Flair relied upon outside interference and dirty tricks to hold on to his championship. Flair, however, would fight like his life was on the line when backed into a corner. Miz hasn't shown that sort of tenacity, and he certainly doesn't have Flair's technical acumen.

But what The Miz does have is the WWE championship and the desire to hold it for as long as possible. That makes him a dangerous competitor. He will do anything in his power to preserve his reign. His Skull-Crushing Finale is a move that can be executed at any time. If he continues to improve his offense and outfox his opponents, Miz may reign for a long, long time … deservedly or not.

RANDY ORTON

Randy Orton is a raging sadist with anger issues. For the past year, he has somehow managed to channel his rage into somewhat socially acceptable outlets, such as feuds with former allies Cody Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr., battling The Miz, and evening the odds against The New Nexus by systematically incapacitating each member of CM Punk's contingent.

Assuming that his WM win over Punk will allow him to move beyond his feud with The New Nexus (and that may be a big assumption, as Punk has to be yearning for revenge), Orton's next step is hard to predict. At his best, he has been a schemer who has laid plans and executed them with savage efficiency. But Orton can also be unfocused and allow his temper to get in his way. Miz exploited that weakness, and then moved on to new challenges while Orton allowed himself to get bogged down in a feud that had no title implications whatsoever.

Orton has been at his best when he has had other people at his side. Triple-H, Ric Flair, and his father have mentored him and helped him maintain his focus. Rhodes and DiBiase also had a stabilizing effect. Orton needs allies to keep him on an even keel; otherwise, he can be headstrong, careless, and easily goaded into dangerous situations.

Though the fans have embraced Randy Orton, his feud with The Miz, and later, The New Nexus proved that being popular has done nothing to diminish his sadistic streak.

Orton has an opportunity to ride his momentum from WrestleMania into a title match against The Miz. However, we don't see it happening. Without an

adviser or trusted ally in his corner, Orton is likely to dive headfirst into another needless feud. Miz is vulnerable, but Orton has to recognize it and act quickly.

Photo by George Napolitano

Though he fared poorly in his feud with Kane, The Undertaker bounced back with a strong match at WM27. At this stage of his career, 'Taker sets his own schedule, so what's next for the "Dead Man" is uncertain.

THE UNDERTAKER

The "Dead Man" extended his WrestleMania streak to 19-0, but at what cost? Undertaker managed to make Triple-H tap out to the Hell's Gate finisher, but he could barely get out of the ring after the match was over and had to be carted to the back. Undertaker is 46 years old and has been wrestling since 1984. Strategic sabbaticals and an excellent training regimen have helped him prolong his career and have enabled him to compete at an elite level after more than a quarter-century of battles, but that can't last forever. He may be a "Dead Man," but he isn't immortal. Age is starting to catch up.

Last year, Kane dominated Undertaker during their feud, eventually beating 'Taker in a "Buried Alive" match. Kane claimed Undertaker was a shell of his former self. While Kane was premature in pronouncing the end of The Undertaker, his words had a ring of truth. Undertaker may be "The Phenom," but he is also flesh and bones. And flesh grows weaker, bone grows more brittle ... especially for an athlete who has been pushing himself to the limit for as long as he has.

If the past is any indication, Undertaker will probably keep a low profile for the next few months. Perhaps he'll return in mid-summer to exact revenge on Nexus or Kane. Maybe he'll feud with Alberto Del Rio, or even have a rematch against Triple-H. It is unlikely to see him commit to a full-time travel schedule, which makes it unlikely that he will contend for the World championship this year.

Undertaker's focus now is on WrestleMania 28, where he will have the opportunity to extend the greatest streak in wrestling history to a tidy 20-0. And once that goal is accomplished, we expect the "Dead Man" to ease off into a well-deserved retirement back in Death Valley.

TRIPLE-H

Triple-H made a telling comment during his segment with Shawn Michaels and The Undertaker prior to WrestleMania.

"Somewhere along the way, you decided it was more important to be 'The Showstopper' and 'Mr. WrestleMania, 'which you are," Triple-H said to Michaels. "But you realized a long time ago, Shawn, you don't have to win every night to be those things. I'm not Shawn Michaels. Not even close. I have to win."

Triple-H has collected 13 world championships throughout his storied career, but he has never been the show-stealing in-ring competitor that Michaels was. The remark showed a new insight into the mind of "The Cerebral Assassin." Triple-H is looking to cement his legacy.

His mentor, Ric Flair, was retired (albeit not permanently) by Michaels three years ago. Michaels was sent into retirement last year. Steve Austin and The Rock—once two of Triple-H's arch-enemies—were at WrestleMania as special guests, long since retired.

It would have been impossible for HHH not to have retirement on his mind on April 3. And it must

Photo by George Napolitano

Triple-H slings a chair into the midsection of Sheamus. Odds are these two will meet often in 2011, and probably in pursuit of a WWE world title.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Sting provided some much-needed stability at the top of the TNA roster by winning the TNA World title from Jeff Hardy. However, "The Stinger" seems like an illogical candidate for a very long title run.

have weighed even more heavily upon his mind in the hours after the match, as he iced down in the locker room and eased his sore muscles into a hotel bed hours later.

Triple-H still has plenty of fight left in him, but he's much closer to the end of his career than the beginning. He also has accepted a new role as head of WWE's talent development department. Plus, he has three young daughters at home.

Triple-H adores wrestling, though, and he is certain to give his all as long as he is still competing. He is likely to make a serious run for the WWE championship, and perhaps even see if he can top Flair's mark of 16 world titles before he's finished.

STING

Sting made a dramatic return to TNA to surprise Jeff Hardy for the TNA World title, but it's hard to imagine him having a lengthy reign. Sting has a long history of sulking when things don't go his way, and he has made it abundantly clear that he has no interest in wrestling a full-time schedule or touring across the country.

So, what value does Sting truly have for TNA in 2011? Quite a bit, actually.

Sting arrived at the perfect time and was able to relieve Hardy of the championship. Sting won't stay on top for long, but he does add a marquee name to the TNA title mix and make a compelling opponent for Mr. Anderson, Rob Van Dam, or Kurt Angle.

Sting is a steady hand in a very uncertain time for TNA. He has been able to be a stabilizing influence in the locker room while simultaneously providing a spark to the main-event picture.

At 52 years old, Sting is significantly slower than he was during his prime, but what he lost in foot speed and power he has made up for with experience. Sting has helped mentor wrestlers like Abyss and AJ Styles. He also proved that he can still compete against wrestling's top stars. Properly utilized, Sting is a major player in TNA. However, Sting is not the right man to carry TNA for an extended period of time. He is in a position to pass the proverbial torch, and it is time for him to do so. A clean win over "The Stinger" can help launch a career.

SHEAMUS

The "Celtic Warrior" has had a topsy-turvy year, slipping from the WWE championship to an embarrassing slump that saw him drop matches to Santino Marella and Evan Bourne. Sheamus was absolutely humiliated by a returning Triple-H. Even a fancy new cape and crown and the title of "King Sheamus" wasn't enough to lift the massive Dubliner out of his tailspin.

It would seem that Sheamus' troubles were all in his head. After experiencing incredible success early in his WWE career, Sheamus slipped into a sophomore slump and began losing confidence. He began making rookie mistakes, such as losing his temper and getting careless against smaller opponents. If anything, winning the King of the Ring tournament only made him more careless and put him into a deeper funk.

Fortunately for him, Sheamus is too competitive to wallow in a losing slump for long. He took drastic action when he challenged Daniel Bryan for the U.S. title and vowed to leave WWE if he lost. He gambled and he won big, capturing the U.S. title and reasserting himself as a force to be reckoned with on Raw.

Photo by George Napolitano

After some bumpy times in early-'11, Sheamus' self-confidence has returned and is evident in the U.S. champion's recent performances.

As WWE stays in TV-PG mode, TNA will look to assume a more adult profile. The blustery, and often vulgar, Mr. Anderson will likely lead the charge.

Now that he's back to his winning ways, Sheamus' arrogance is back in full force. He has ditched his kingly togs and adopted red, white, and blue gear to symbolize his status as U.S. champion. He got his groove back, and the U.S. championship may be just what he needed to propel himself back into contention for the WWE championship.

In little more than two years in WWE, Sheamus has won two world titles, the King of the Ring tournament, and the U.S. championship. That's impressive. More gold is sure to follow, as long as he can avoid another major slump.

MR. ANDERSON

Anderson takes pride in being … well, someone who is out for himself and he doesn't give a damn if he makes friends or not. All that Anderson wants is the TNA World championship, and there is every reason to believe he will wear that title belt again in the near future.

"Stone-Cold" Steve Austin has always inspired Anderson, and he is using tactics right out of the Austin playbook, creating headaches for management and striking out at authority at every turn. It has worked. By breaking the rules and being a thorn in the sides of Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff, Anderson has risen to the top of the card and has positioned himself as the heir apparent to the World title.

With his flippant attitude and crude language, Anderson has become the embodiment of the edgy style TNA is looking to promote. In many ways, he has become the poster boy for TNA in 2011.

Anderson's Mic Check finisher is as sudden and as lethal as Austin's Stunner. Anderson has proven he can brawl with the best and grapple with the greatest.

Of course, he cannot be trusted. Given the right opportunity, he'd sell out *anyone* for a title shot. Anderson is a Machiavellian schemer, and he'll turn his back on the fans the moment a good opportunity comes along. That makes him ideally suited for TNA, where the authority figures change with the wind.

Anderson is a survivor and he is primed to have a career year in TNA.

ALBERTO DEL RIO

Alberto Del Rio says it is his destiny to win the World heavyweight title. That destiny suffered a setback at WrestleMania 27, but Del Rio isn't likely to let that loss derail his dreams. After all, Del Rio overcame disappointments en route to a championship amateur wrestling career, an impressive MMA run, and a championship run in Mexico. It's going to take more than one loss and one vandalized Rolls-Royce to humble Del Rio.

Del Rio's tactics may be underhanded, but there's no disputing his technical proficiency, toughness, and cruelty. Del Rio is a master of one of the most dangerous submission moves in the game today. The cross-armbreaker can be applied at virtually any time, without requiring a great deal of setup. It is a difficult move to escape, and even more difficult to counter.

By trashing his Rolls-Royce, Edge made his feud with Del Rio personal. At the time it was considered a tactical error. Del Rio has already injured both Christian and Rey Mysterio Jr., with his cross-armbreaker, and he certainly wasn't above attacking Edge and inflicting a serious injury.

Despite failing to win the World title from Edge at WM27, Alberto Del Rio figures to play a prominent role in WWE going forward. Another feud with Rey Mysterio Jr. (pictured) seems certain.

An angry Del Rio is a dangerous Del Rio, especially with the massive Brodus Clay in his corner. Del Rio is likely to respond to his 'Mania loss by lashing out at Edge's best friend, Christian, and anyone else that gets in his way. Indeed, the following night on *Raw*, Del Rio seemed much more focused on brutalizing Evan Bourne than antagonizing the fans. Everyone on the Smackdown brand should be walking on eggshells around Del Rio these days. We expect that he'll eventually get the gold he covets, even if he has to resort to extreme measures to do it.

Jeff Jarrett's MMA obsession might be a farce, but it has helped him expand his repertoire ... and defeat Kurt Angle. Jarrett's looked better of late than he has in years.

JEFF JARRETT

Sure, the "Double-J, Double-M-A Challenge" was a ploy designed to tweak shootfighting aficionados Samoa Joe and Kurt Angle, but Jeff Jarrett has managed to successfully incorporate several MMA-inspired takedowns, submission locks, and chokes into his repertoire. The MMA influence has helped Jarrett update his game, which had remained relatively stagnant over the past decade.

Since being relieved of his official duties within the TNA front office, Jarrett has been allowed to concentrate purely on being a wrestler and not a wrestler/executive. As a result, his ring work has improved considerably, and Jarrett has gone on a tear, scoring wins over Joe and Angle, among others. Jarrett looks better than he has in years, but his future is in the hands of one Angle and one former Angle. Kurt Angle has pledged to make Jarrett pay for airing his dirty laundry and bringing his ex-wife, Karen, into the fray. Jarrett cost Kurt custody of his children, and Angle is determined to make Jarrett pay for that indignity as well.

But the bigger challenge facing Jarrett may prove to be Karen. Karen is a high-maintenance woman. She has been known to be a major distraction to every man she has managed. There are already cracks appearing in the "happy little family" facade Jarrett is presenting. Once Karen starts her trademark nagging, whining, and complaining, Jarrett is bound to get grief from all sides. By the end of the year, Jarrett will probably be ruing the day he first brought Karen back to the Impact Zone.

The last thing Jarrett needs at this stage is another distraction, and Karen certainly qualifies as one—a major one. As long as Jarrett keeps himself embroiled in this bizarre soap opera, he's going to be locked out of title contention. Given how well he has been wrestling in recent months, that is a shame.

KURT ANGLE

Kurt Angle's career has been extremely erratic the past few years. Personal problems and questionable behavior outside the ring have threatened to derail his career. Most recently, Angle was charged with operating a motor vehicle while impaired when police found his car stranded on a median outside Pittsburgh. Before that was the accusation of harassment from his former live-in girlfriend, as well as accusations of DUI. In addition, his marital problems have played out on cable-TV for the entire world to see.

Angle is still one of the finest wrestlers in the world, but this never-ending string of poor decisions is troubling. The Olympic gold medalist just can't seem to stay away from controversy for very long.

Of course, we would prefer to focus on Angle's wrestling abilities and his feud with Jarrett.

Put simply: Angle should be TNA World champion. He is an absolute animal in the ring and is one of the most skilled pure wrestling technicians ever to compete. His hunger, drive, and passion are unsurpassed. If he can win his feud against Jarrett, he will be in prime position to contend for the TNA World title. However, given the Jeff Hardy embarrassment at Victory Road, TNA may not be willing to allow Angle to contend for the World title as long as he's getting cited by the police for driving under the influence.

Maybe Angle needs an intervention. Or maybe he just needs to get his head out of his butt and

Jarrett has been a thorn in Kurt Angle's side, no question. However, Angle's own behavior may be just as big an obstacle to him winning another TNA World championship.

She may use some ugly tactics at times, but the lovely Madison Rayne has put together an impressive run as Knockouts champion. Whatever transpires for the TNA women in 2011, Rayne figures to be in the middle of it.

start behaving responsibly. We're tired of seeing Angle embarrass himself.

MADISON RAYNE

The so-called "Queen Bee" of TNA has been the most dominant Knockout of the past few years. The former Beautiful Person has been on a winning streak ever since she persuaded Tara to lie down and give her the title belt.

Rayne has defended her championship against all comers. She has even gone so far as to issue an open challenge, and then successfully defeat ODB, Nikki Roxx, and Alissa Flash. While it remains to be seen whether she can fend off the challenge of Mickie James, Rayne has already silenced the critics and has to be considered the favorite for the top spot of the 2011 "*PWI* Female 50" rankings.

Of course, Rayne has relied on illegal tactics to hold on to her championship. In addition to having Tara interfere on her behalf, Rayne has also used a loaded glove to knock out opponents. Rayne may not be a technical master, but she is versatile, crafty, and clever. She is also extremely successful.

As of this writing, Rayne has held the Knockouts championship for more than four months, and she has defended the championship against arguably the most diverse and impressive array of contenders during that time as any Knockouts champion.

At some point, however, Rayne will lose the championship. It will be interesting to see how she responds to that loss. Either it will send her into a tailspin, or it will push her to win her fourth Knockouts title. Either way, Rayne figures to be the cornerstone of the Knockouts division for the foreseeable future.

EDDIE EDWARDS

The former American Wolf is the first man ever to win Ring of Honor's version of the triple crown, the tag team, TV, and heavyweight championships. Edwards defeated Roderick Strong to win the heavyweight title on March 19. He ascended to the championship at a pivotal time in Ring of Honor history.

ROH has lost its national television outlet on HDNet. The company has struggled to fill the void created by the defection of former champions like Bryan Danielson, CM Punk, and Nigel McGuinness. Either Edwards is taking the helm just after the S.S. ROH has struck the iceberg, or he might just be the man who can spark a revival and lead the promotion into a turnaround.

Edwards isn't the flashiest of competitors, but he embodies the ideals that drive Ring of Honor. He is an exciting wrestler with an athletic, high-impact style and an innovative, mat-based offense. He is a no-frills grappler cut from the same cloth as Danielson and Lance Storm. He expertly blends aerial attacks (such as a spectacular flying Codebreaker) with stiff kicks and tight submission locks. He has already successfully defended the ROH title against Christopher Daniels, and he may have the potential to develop into a signature star, just as Punk and Samoa Joe did before him.

A feud with his former American Wolves partner Davey Richards seems to be on the horizon. Edwards and Richards know each other well, and they have the skills to push each other to new heights. A feud between Richards and Edwards could create renewed interest in the ROH title and lead to a series of fantastic matches

Eddie Edwards may not be a very flashy, but he does have the credibility to generate interest in the ROH heavyweight title, and possibly another national television network.

between two of the sport's rising young stars ... and maybe even a new national television deal.

DAVEY RICHARDS

Two years ago, Davey Richards created a bit of a controversy when he said he was nearing the end of his wrestling career because he wanted to become a firefighter. While that is certainly a noble goal, it seemed to signal the end of a very promising wrestling career. Fortunately, Richards had a change of heart and has signed a contract extension with Ring of Honor. That is great news for ROH, as Richards is one of the company's most valuable assets.

The submission master is trained in martial arts and has enjoyed several successful tours of Japan. He has incorporated Japanese "strong style" strikes and slams into his repertoire and is one of the most well-rounded wrestlers on the independent circuit.

Richards has been chasing the ROH championship for the past year, but failed to unseat both Tyler Black and Roderick Strong in title opportunities. Now that his former tag team partner, Eddie Edwards, has the ROH championship, Richards appears to be a natural contender for that title. The fact that Edwards defeated Richards in the finals of a tournament to crown the first TV champion only adds to the intrigue of this potential matchup.

Richards is an explosive wrestler who can be compared to a young Dynamite Kid or Chris Benoit. If he is fully focused on wrestling and no longer looking ahead to an early retirement, Richards is one of the true MVPs of ROH.

Ring of Honor needs Davey Richards. Richards has been a loyal soldier for the company, and a feud against Edwards can help elevate the championship to a level it hasn't seen since the heyday of Samoa Joe. Richards has the abilities to become the heavyweight champion. His time is coming soon enough.

CM PUNK

CM Punk needs to sit down and develop a new strategy. Clearly, cliques and stables just aren't his thing.

Punk pulled off a coup when he revealed himself to be the leader of The New Nexus following Wade Barrett's departure to Smackdown. He relied on his Nexus stooges to help him win the Royal Rumble, but John Cena derailed that plan by plowing through Punk's army. Punk responded by targeting Randy Orton and siccing his thugs on the third-generation star, but Orton managed to incapacitate each member of the Nexus with vicious punts to the head, then scored the clean pinfall over Punk at WrestleMania.

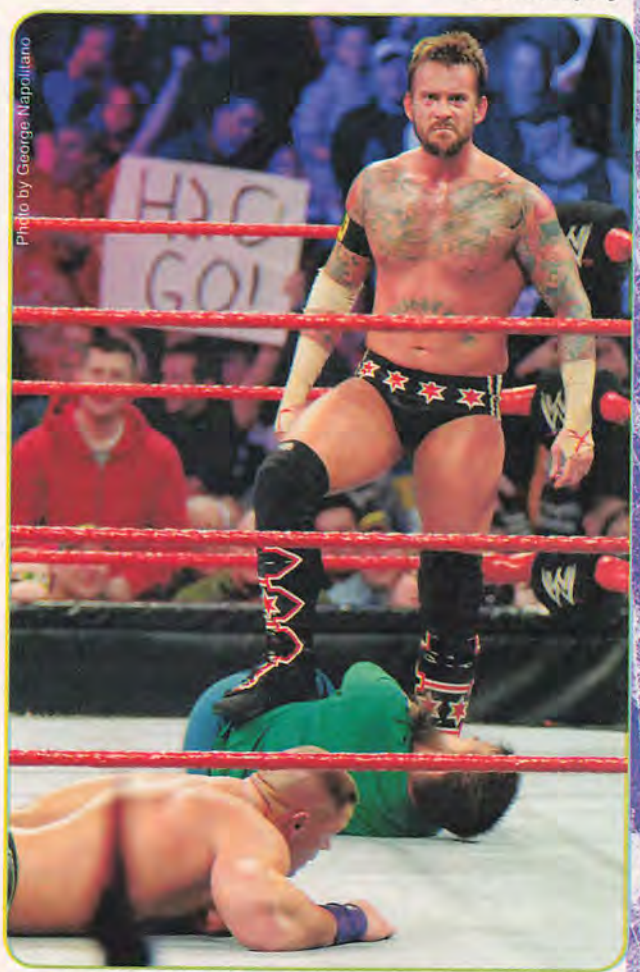
Just like the Straight Edge Society before it, Punk's faction didn't get the job done. Whether Punk plans to reform Nexus or dismantle the entire thing remains to be seen. Punk is good in his role as the crazed messiah of a team of misfits, but relying on others to do his dirty work has made him lazy.

Punk is one of wrestling's great masters of psychological warfare. He can get inside an opponent's head and toy with his emotions, then respond with cold-blooded efficiency and a jarring, vicious style. Punk's knee strikes are things of beauty. His Go To Sleep finisher can crack an orbital bone or cause a concussion. His anaconda vice and Koji clutch submissions are underrated finishers that can be applied quickly and forcefully.

In other words, he doesn't need stooges to succeed. In fact, the Straight Edge Society and New Nexus may have been holding Punk back.

Punk may want to consider a move to Smackdown, where a feud with Edge could bring him back to the World title. He has the wrestling ability, personality, and charisma to have a lengthy run with a world title; he just doesn't need the hangers-on to distract him from that goal.

—Dan Murphy



CM Punk might find himself in better stead if he stays away from factions for a while, as they tend to hold him back from reaching his true potential.

STATE OF BUSINESS

In last year's State of the Business, we concluded that the best thing for the business of wrestling was for TNA to put a noticeable dent in *Raw's* ratings and force WWE to raise its game. That hasn't happened, but the major U.S. wrestling companies have managed to find ways to navigate through a prolonged financial storm

TNA INVESTED IN everyone from Hulk Hogan to *The Jersey Shore's* Angelina and was still barely able to move the ratings needle, let alone mount a credible challenge to WWE. It seems clear that wrestling's next big boom period won't be prompted by a Monday Night War-style ratings battle. Instead, America's top wrestling promotions are searching for new ways to build brand awareness, develop new revenue streams, and increase business through a lingering recession.

WWE has taken a bold move by adopting a PG-rated business model. Crude language, risqué outfits, and blood have been replaced by family-friendly fare. WWE has successfully reached out to younger fans, both through television content and astute marketing endeavors, such as the launch of *WWE Kids* magazine and the wwekids.com website.

John Cena and Rey Mysterio Jr. have helped attract young fans to WWE, which has helped WWE build strong strategic partnerships and snag lucrative advertising deals. The company has established a partnership with Walmart, which has become the exclusive retailer for WWE Studios' films.

WWE also has enjoyed a successful partnership with Mattel, which produces the very successful WWE action-figure line.

The logic of marketing toward younger audiences is unassailable: Instead of selling one ticket to an 18-year-old fan who is drawn to Attitude Era programming, WWE can sell tickets to a 10-year-old fan, his 8-year-old brother, and mom and dad. It also gives WWE an opportunity to develop "lifelong fans" by attracting them at an early age and retaining a percentage of those viewers for years to come. The strategy certainly worked during the mid-1980s, when Vince McMahon launched Hulkamania, The Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection, and the

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Triple-H shows his willingness to embrace WWE's TV-PG philosophy by starring in WWE Films' *The Chaperone*, a safe family-friendly comedy.

first WrestleMania.

The increased popularity of mixed martial arts has eroded some of WWE's 18-to-30-year-old fan base, and MMA has proven highly successful in the pay-per-view universe. MMA typically appeals to a demographic over 18 years of age. By actively marketing to children, WWE may be able to develop brand loyalty with new fans long before they discover UFC.

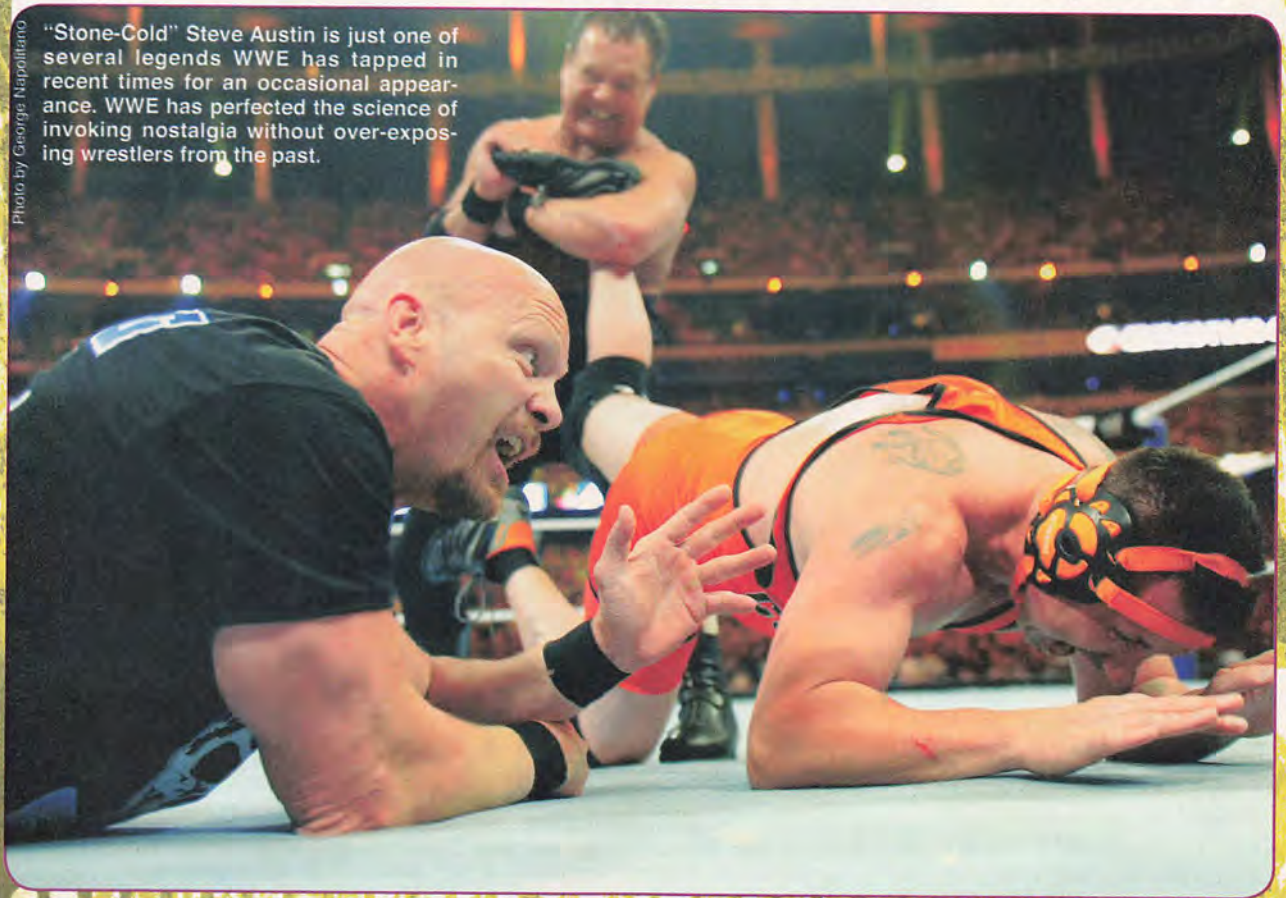
Of course, the biggest challenge to this approach is to avoid alienating current fans. As the reactions to Cena have shown, there is a considerable portion of the WWE audience that rejects Cena and the family-friendly era he has come to represent. To combat that, WWE has done a good job of spotlighting great names from the past, which allows older fans to see stars from the previous generation and remind them of their favorite memories. Again, this helps WWE maintain brand loyalty.

In the recent past, WWE has brought back Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Trish Stratus, Steve Austin, and The Rock. It has also showcased stars from previous eras through the WWE Hall of Fame. This approach has helped WWE bridge eras, and has enabled the company to retain longtime fans while simultaneously attracting grade school students. Very few sports leagues or entertainment companies have been as successful in building a universal fan base as has WWE.

WWE has also been aggressive in developing international revenue streams. According to published quarterly dividend statements, WWE programming is broadcast in more than 145 countries and in 30 languages, and reaches more than 500 million homes worldwide. In addition to the corporate office in Stamford, Connecticut, WWE has offices in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, London, Shanghai, Singapore, Tokyo, and Mexico City. The company ran its first show in China in 2010, and that nation could become a major market in years to come.

The recent signing of Sin Cara (formerly Mistico) has the potential to be one of the company's most valuable pickups in recent years. Though WWE always draws well when it tours Mexico, the addition of a proven attraction like Sin Cara can only help attendance and merchandise sales south of the border. And, as Rey Mysterio has shown, younger fans are drawn to smaller masked wrestlers with incredible aerial moves. Sin Cara has the potential to become just as big of an attraction as Mysterio, which is significant for both the youth and Hispanic demographics.

Of course, the ongoing recession has taken a toll. There have been significant drops in home video sales and live event attendance. Video game sales were down industry-wide in 2010



"Stone-Cold" Steve Austin is just one of several legends WWE has tapped in recent times for an occasional appearance. WWE has perfected the science of invoking nostalgia without over-exposing wrestlers from the past.

Photo by George Napolitano

(though WWE has high hopes for the new *WWE All-Stars* release). The planned launch of a WWE television network has been delayed, and plans for a new WWE Media Center have been put on hold. Also, the resignation of Chief Operating Officer Donna Goldsmith created a major void in WWE's front office.

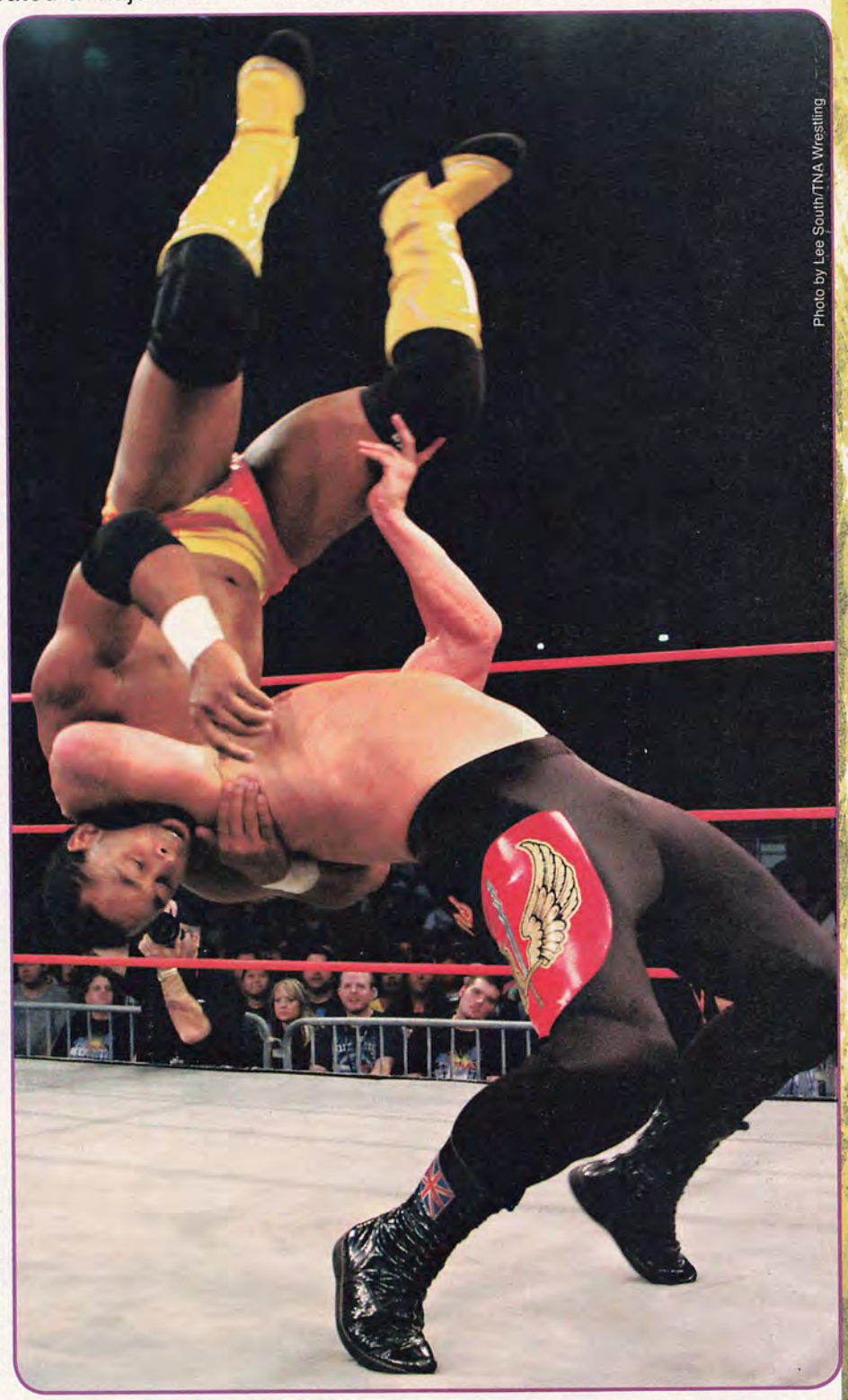
Unlike WWE, TNA is not a publicly held company and its accounting figures are not published for public consumption.

While it is impossible to know the state of the company's finances, it is safe to assume that TNA executives cannot be happy with the past year. TNA brought in Hogan, Eric Bischoff, Jeff Hardy, Mickie James, Mr. Anderson, and several other big-name stars. While ratings have increased a couple tenths of a point (typically ranging in the 1.1-1.2 territory), the new faces did not bring the television ratings or PPV buys the office had expected.

TNA has been hurt by its inability to chart a decisive course of action and stay with it. Over the past year, Rob Van Dam, Jeff Hardy, and Mr. Anderson all won the World championship. Each one had a brief reign until the championship went back to Sting. Instead of taking a bold step forward, TNA constantly falls back into its comfort zone. It even hosted an ECW reunion, allowing its top stars to sit out while Tommy Dreamer, Stevie Richards, and Rhyno took center stage.

TNA's unpredictable booking and constant stops and re-starts have ruined its momentum. Every time the company begins to build an exciting rivalry, it gets buried in unneeded stipulations and gimmicks, and then moves into a different direction entirely.

Thanks in large part to the support of Panda Energy, TNA has managed to remain in business for nine years now. Dixie Carter and Jeff Jarrett have said that TNA has been profitable



Douglas Williams, shown here suplexing Jay Lethal, uses a European-influenced mat style that is a big hit with TNA's international fans. Showcasing an international flair has translated into a successful tour of Europe and robust television ratings overseas.

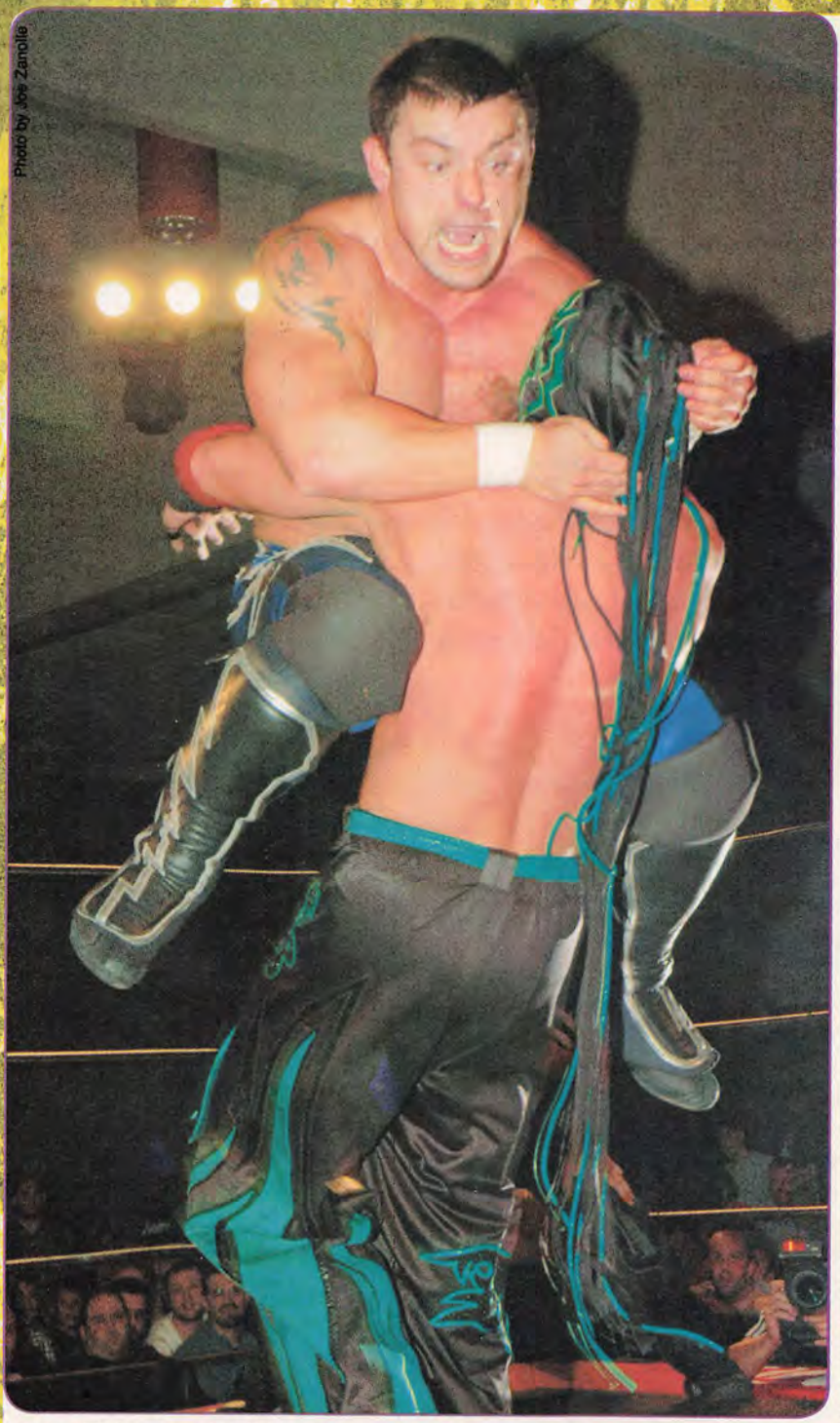


Photo by Joe Zanolle

Davey Richards and Delirious are two of ROH's most talented wrestlers. However, introducing their work to new fans will be much more difficult for ROH's since it's deal with HDNet expired in April.

on its own merits, but critics have been skeptical of those claims.

The company has managed to survive through leaner years than the past one, though, and TNA appears to be on stable ground for the foreseeable future. But despite claims to the contrary, TNA is not in a growth mode. The international market and outside bookings have helped, but it needs to open new revenue streams if it ever wants to break a 1.5 in the ratings or consistently hit 15,000 buys on PPV. Those are pie-in-the-sky numbers for TNA. Given the talent on hand, they shouldn't be.

The pay-per-view buy rates of WWE, TNA, and UFC take a major hit from online piracy *(see story on page 72)*. Hopefully, the steps being taken to remedy that problem will prove be successful.

TNA has enjoyed some success in international markets, particularly with *Impact* moving to Sky TV in the United Kingdom in January. TNA programming is drawing strong ratings overseas, and the company capitalized with a successful tour of England, Ireland, Scotland, France, and Germany earlier this year. The international market could become one of TNA's most lucrative growth opportunities, especially with the company prominently featuring international talent and international-themed events, such as the World X Cup tournament.

As for Ring of Honor, the loss of HDNet was a damaging blow. Not only did the Mark Cuban-owned network provide a national outlet, its production values gave ROH a big-time feel. ROH's Internet pay-per-views are proving more and more successful, and the company deserves credit for its outside-the-box thinking in that area. Likewise, the company should be given credit for its ability to maintain a fan base, even with the loss of some of its top stars and its national television outlet. ROH has managed to successfully build its brand by delivering a consistent product. For ROH, that product is superior athletic wrestling presented as a legitimate competition. That basic mission statement has allowed the company to survive obstacles that would ruin other promotions. ROH is hanging on for dear life, but it is holding true to its vision, which is very much appreciated by its loyal customers.

—Dan Murphy

STATE OF

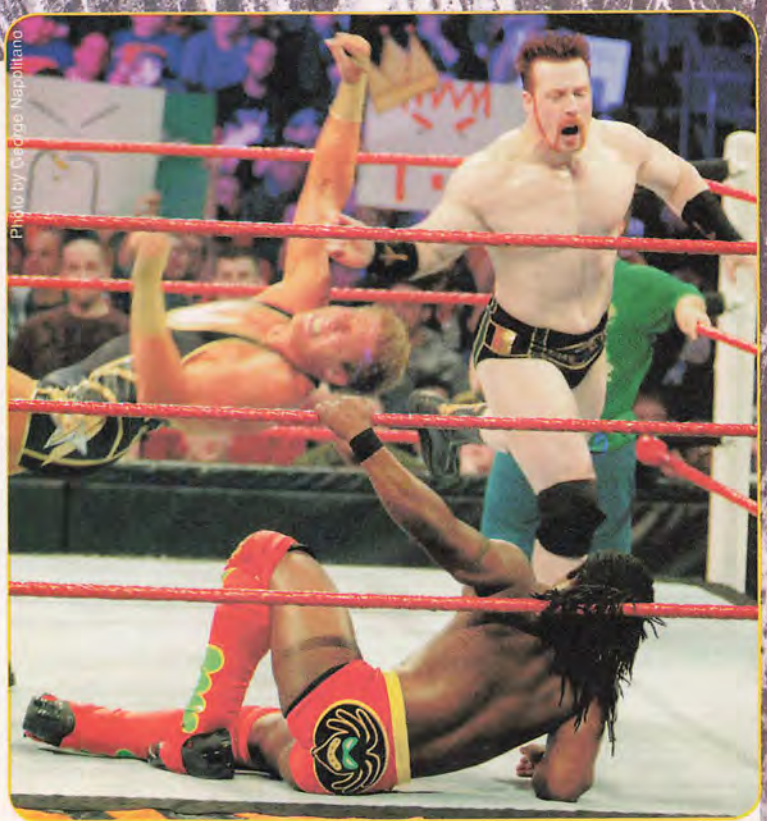
THE FUT

For the past few years, our State of the Future analysis focused on one central issue: the ability—or inability—of WWE and TNA to create new stars. In order for wrestling to survive, it requires bold, new superstars that are ready to put their own mark on the business to attract, and retain, fans

IN 2010, WWE experimented with a youth movement. Sheamus, The Miz, and Jack Swagger collected world championships, while Drew McIntyre, John Morrison, Dolph Ziggler, and The Nexus graduated to prominent positions on the roster. The movement yielded mixed results. Swagger, Sheamus, and Nexus slumped back to the undercard after very brief moments on top, while McIntyre, Ziggler, and Morrison joined Cody Rhodes, Evan Bourne, and several other would-be headliners on the mid-card treadmill. Only The Miz appears to have legs as a long-term main-event player, and most fans perceive him to be an undeserving champion.

In other words, WWE served up a batch of fresh names, but no one truly captured the imagination. There was plenty of in-ring talent, but seemingly no over-the-top personalities that could potentially become the cornerstone of WWE.

That is cause for concern. It has been nearly a decade since the glory days of The Rock and Steve Austin. John Cena has done an impressive job as WWE's flag-bearer (and, by extension, pro wrestling's flag-bearer), but Cena continues to be a polarizing figure. WWE lost Batista, Shawn Michaels, and Chris Jericho last year. Edge is gone, and Triple-H, Undertaker, and Rey Mysterio Jr. have all been the subject of retirement rumors. WWE has yet to find anyone who has proven he can step up and fill those spots. That could be a cause for alarm.



Sheamus, Jack Swagger, and Kofi Kingston are three future stars WWE is counting on to carry the load as some of its more established veterans contemplate retirement. Though they've had some bright moments, none established himself as a bona fide main-eventer. That should have WWE concerned.

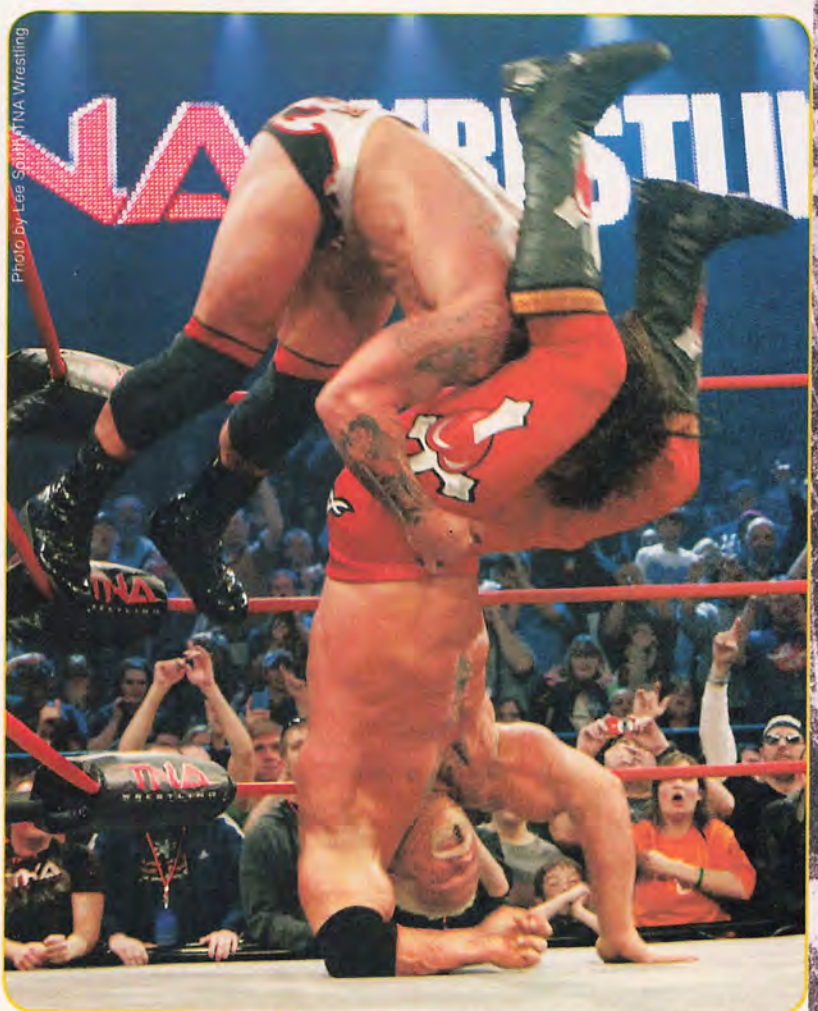
URE

Perhaps the key lies in the rumored shakeup of the WWE developmental system. In recent months, there has been speculation that Triple-H (who has accepted a backstage role as an advisor to WWE Chairman Vince McMahon) is looking to revamp the company's developmental program in Florida Championship Wrestling.

Critics of the current system claim that it homogenizes talent and churns out generic, cookie-cutter wrestlers. The critics contend that these wrestlers are rushed through developmental, and then—if they're lucky—given a very brief opportunity to make it on the main WWE roster. This can foster an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. One bad match or one garbled promo could end a developmental wrestler's hopes. Given those looming fears, it can be easy to see why so few developmental wrestlers are pushing the boundaries or experimenting with new moves, styles, or personalities. In essence, some contend that the WWE developmental system has squeezed the creativity and ingenuity out of wrestling.

Some changes to the developmental system that could re-instill that creativity and excitement could lead to a ripple effect throughout WWE. In an interesting twist, Mexican sensation Sin Cara was brought onto the main roster without going through the developmental system. There is hope that his unique, lucha libre-based style can help him stand out in WWE, rather than having him be reconditioned on the farm.

Another thing that will affect WWE's future is the decision to move to family-friendly content. In theory, the tamer fare makes the company more attractive to advertisers, strengthening revenue streams and opening cross-promotional opportunities. However, with WWE gearing much of its



"Big Poppa Pump" may have a Frankensteiner or two left in him, but to ensure a better future, TNA must establish younger stars like Gunner as viable heirs to its veteran leaders.

Hungry, young wrestlers like James Storm, Robert Roode, Kazarian, and AJ Styles seem to have TNA President Dixie Carter's support, but so far they haven't been given a chance to lead the company.

product toward a younger demographic, it has risked alienating its core audience of fans who purchase tickets and pay-per-views. WWE has been walking a fine line, trying to retain two very different audiences. It is important for WWE executives to realize that younger viewers have a short attention span and are susceptible to hopping from one fad to the next. Remember Tamagotchis, Pokemon, and Furbies?

The success of WWE helps the entire wrestling business. It serves as an entryway that introduces fans to the squared circle and then helps them discover TNA, Ring of Honor, and independent promotions. For WWE to continue to succeed through this recession, it has to continue to rely on proven stars like Cena, The Undertaker, and Triple-H, and to keep searching for the next big thing that can step into a leading role when needed. The PG approach has won over new fans and sold plenty of Cena merchandise, but WWE has to remember its bread-and-butter of 18-to-34-year-olds as well. Based on the buildup to WrestleMania 27, which pushed the boundaries of family-friendly content, it looks like that is exactly what WWE is trying to do.

TNA's future isn't so easy to chart. The company has struggled through several starts, stops, and relaunches since Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff came on board in January 2010. With the surprise return of Sting and the controversy over Jeff Hardy's performance at Victory Road, the TNA World title picture is as confusing as it has ever been.

While WWE embraced a family-friendly approach, TNA has an opportunity to establish itself as a unique and cutting-edge promotion, just as the original ECW did 15 years ago when WWE was promoting wrestling racecar drivers, evil dentists, and hog slop matches. Blood flows fairly regularly on *Impact,* and The Beautiful People flaunt much more skin than the WWE Divas. Other than that, however, TNA frequently allows itself to come across as a poor man's WWE. The promo hyping Sting's return on the heels of WWE's much talked-about "2-21-11" Undertaker vignette epitomized TNA's "monkey see, monkey do" approach.

As long as TNA remains content with being "WWE Lite," it is likely to remain exactly what it is today—a

turbulent promotion struggling to break 1.3 ratings and constantly getting lost in WWE's shadow.

TNA has a lot of things in its favor—a deep roster, a passionate fan base, and a manageable touring schedule. The company is coming up on its 10th anniversary in 2012, which is a Herculean feat that only a handful of national promotions have been able to achieve.

The key to TNA's future rests with management. The company badly needs a fresh creative spark. Like WWE, it must elevate its own batch of stars. TNA has young lions like AJ Styles, Beer Money, and Samoa Joe looking for their opportunity to become the face of the company.

The biggest fallacy in wrestling is Eric Bischoff's favorite phrase: "Controversy creates cash." It's simply not true. Controversy can also ruin companies and careers. Instead of being controversial, TNA must get back to basics and present the gritty, hard-nosed wrestling that WWE shies away from, and establish itself as a viable alternative to WWE programming. If TNA is able to achieve this, it can provide the much-needed impetus to push WWE out of its complacency and truly ignite the wrestling business into another boom period.

Though Ring of Honor lost its position on HDNet, having Eddie Edwards as the new champion gives it at least one compelling storyline to develop going forward. A feud between Edwards and his American Wolves tag team partner Davey Richards seems inevitable, and that series could very well yield a Match of the Year contender. ROH has been progressive in promoting Internet PPV events and has successfully cultivated a vocal fan following via the Internet and social media, but some feel that's not enough to grow the brand. Certainly, without a TV presence, ROH is in no position to challenge WWE (or TNA) for supremacy, or even market share, but it should be pointed out that ROH has been counted out several times before only to see Cary Silkin and company come roaring back.

—Dan Murphy

With no TV deal for ROH, new heavyweight champ Eddie Edwards will have his work cut out when it comes to building the ROH brand. However, if nothing else, ROH has shown over the past few years that it is resilient in the face of adversity.

THE PAY-PER-VIEW PIRACY CRISIS

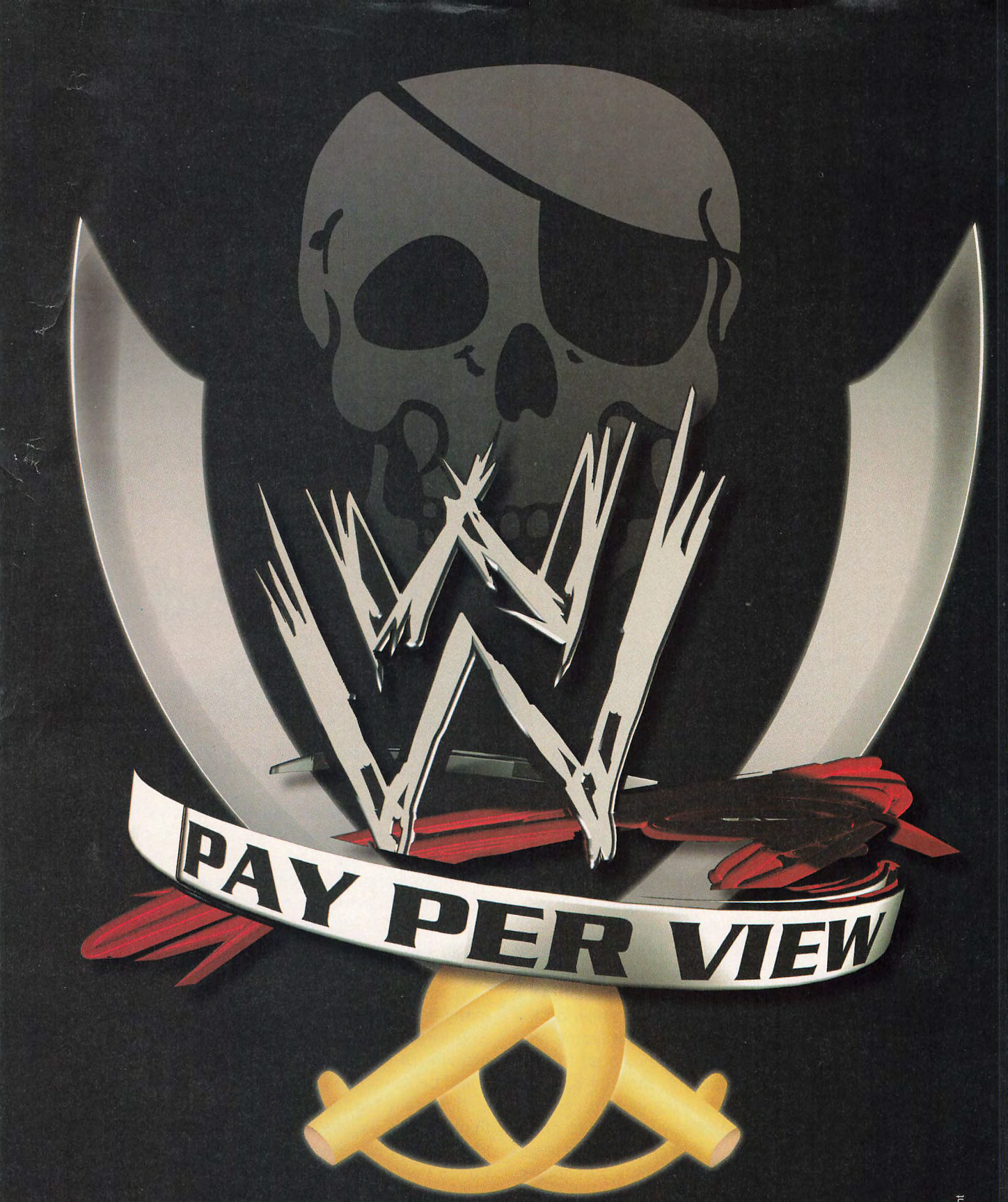
The Wrestling Business Is Being Robbed Blind By "Cockroaches"

TEXT BY **AL CASTLE**

WHETHER IT WAS underground VHS tape trading, "black box" cable-TV converters, or gigantic satellite dishes mounted in a backyard, illegal viewing of wrestling pay-per-view events has been around for about as long as pay-per-views have been.

But the growth of the Internet has made it easier than ever for unscrupulous wrestling fans to steal copyrighted content—and harder for promoters to stop them. So-called "pirate streams" of wrestling pay-per-views are typically just a few clicks away for the savvy Internet surfer. And the number of fans illegally watching shows for free online is taking a sizable bite out of companies' revenue.

Just recently, some promoters and law enforcement authorities have started to fight back using technology to combat technology. Although those efforts may have put a dent in the problem, it remains to be seen whether the Pandora's box of online pirating can ever be closed.



Composite Art by Sam Weyant

Photo by Stu Saks

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

It took one common enemy to unite all of pro wrestling and the MMA industry. That enemy is pay-per-view pirates. TNA's Michael Weber (left) and DGUSA's Gabe Sapolsky (right) are working hard to rid the industry of this rampant problem.

"I compare it to cockroaches," said Dragon Gate USA co-founder Gabe Sapolsky, who has promoted pay-per-view events both on television and on the Internet. "You might be able to get rid of them for a while, but they always creep back in."

Although it may seem like a high-tech problem, it doesn't take a computer wiz to either put up, or watch, an illegal stream of a pay-per-view on the web. All it takes is one fan, legally watching a pay-per-view at home, to share the show on the Internet. Quality can range from poor (some simply point a webcam at their televisions) to near high-definition, for those who directly connect their TV or cable box to their computers.

From there, it can be relatively easy to find a website hosting an illegal stream. Though legitimate video hosting sites like justin.tv, freedocast.com, and ustream.com have taken steps to police their sites for user-uploaded copyrighted content, doing so in real time is not an easy process. Savvy connoisseurs of illegal streams share URLs of the best free streams in underground web forums. It's not unusual to find several hundred viewers for just one stream.

The ease with which fans can watch wrestling pay-per-views for free online serves to disguise the fact that they are actually stealing, say those in the wrestling and pay-per-view industry.

"It's no different than stealing a DVD player that costs $34.95. You would never dream of doing that, would you?" said Michael Weber, TNA's vice president of marketing.

While Weber declined to comment on how many paying viewers he believed TNA was losing to Internet pirates, he acknowledged that "the growth [of pay-per-view] has not been what it could be or should be" because of pirating.

"It's really hard to put a handle on it, because I think there's always been a percentage of theft," said Weber, who has worked in the PPV industry for 25 years. "Has it gotten worse? Possibly. It certainly hasn't gotten any better."

Weber acknowledged that TNA is "not the biggest player in the pay-per-view game," and that WWE, along with UFC and some major boxing events, are losing the most viewers to piracy.

The downward trend in WWE's pay-per-view business would appear to be proof of that.

Although a weak economy and lack of interest may have contributed to the problem, the growing availability of piracy unquestionably had a hand in WWE's domestic pay-per-view revenue dropping 25 percent just from 2009 to 2010.

While PPV thieves may not shed a tear over costing a multimillionaire wrestling promoter a few bucks, the fact is that there are other, more vulnerable victims of piracy—including the thieves themselves.

For smaller wrestling promotions, such as DGUSA or Ring of Honor, losing just a few paying fans to pirates could make a big difference in whether a pay-per-view event is profitable. David Klarman, chief executive officer of gofightlive.TV—the distributor of ROH's Internet pay-per-views—said that if promoters are not able to recoup the expenses of renting a venue, paying talent, and the high production costs of airing a show live on television or on the web, they may decide it's simply not worth doing it.

"Then that guy in England or Ireland or Japan, he's gone. He's shut off. He's going to have to wait a month to buy a DVD," said Klarman, who added that ROH's February iPPV was watched by fans in 28 countries. "It's the guys who are pirating it who are jeopardizing these guys' ability to watch, because Ring of Honor may be losing too much money to the pirates."

The likelihood of WWE shutting down its pay-per-view business because of pirates is far

UFC's parent company, Zuffa, filed suit against video streaming site justin.tv for not doing more to stop illegal streaming of copyrighted pay-per-views. Justin.tv is now using software developed by Vobile to beef up its anti-piracy efforts.

Photo by Josh Hedges/UFC

smaller, but WWE fans, too, are being hurt by illegal streams. Falling revenue can force WWE to increase the prices of its pay-per-views, effectively punishing paying WWE fans for the misdeeds of non-paying ones.

Some may say it is the cost of pay-per-views that drives otherwise law-abiding fans to find illegally pirated PPV streams. And so it becomes the proverbial chicken and the eggconondrum: Does the increasing cost of wrestling pay-per-views lead to piracy? Or does piracy lead to the increasing cost of pay-per-views?

Sapolsky doesn't buy that wrestling promoters contribute to the piracy problem by demanding too much of their fans. He says if fans think there are simply too many pay-per-views, or that they are too expensive, then nobody is forcing them to watch.

"This is ridiculous. If the price is too high then don't buy it and send a message to the promoters that way," said Sapolsky, who believes his DGUSA pay-per-view events are reasonably priced at $20 on TV and $15 on the Internet. "I feel you get every dollar's worth on our shows and that is a very reasonable price. I can't walk into a steakhouse and say, 'This steak is too much money, but I want it, so I'm just going to take it.'"

"We're coming for you!" Pay-per-view piracy is a felony. Federal and local agents are planning "sting" operations to catch and then prosecute violators.

But part of the problem may be that, for too long, people have been able to steal those "steaks" with impunity. Although wrestling companies routinely take down illegal streams as they find them, historically there have been no long-term consequences for pirates or their audience.

That may be changing. In January, UFC's parent company, Zuffa LLC, filed a federal lawsuit against Justin.tv Inc. over what it called the website's "ongoing failure to meaningfully address the rampant and illegal uploading." Zuffa's lawyers said the UFC was losing "millions of dollars" to pirates.

The pay-per-view industry can count on some help from The White House, whose intellectual property enforcement coordinator, Victoria Espinel, is working with Congress to clarify that streaming an event illegally online is a felony.

Because tax is charged on pay-per-view purchases, local government officials have also realized they have a stake in cracking down on illegal pirating. In February, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents seized 10 websites known for illegally streaming live sporting events over the web.

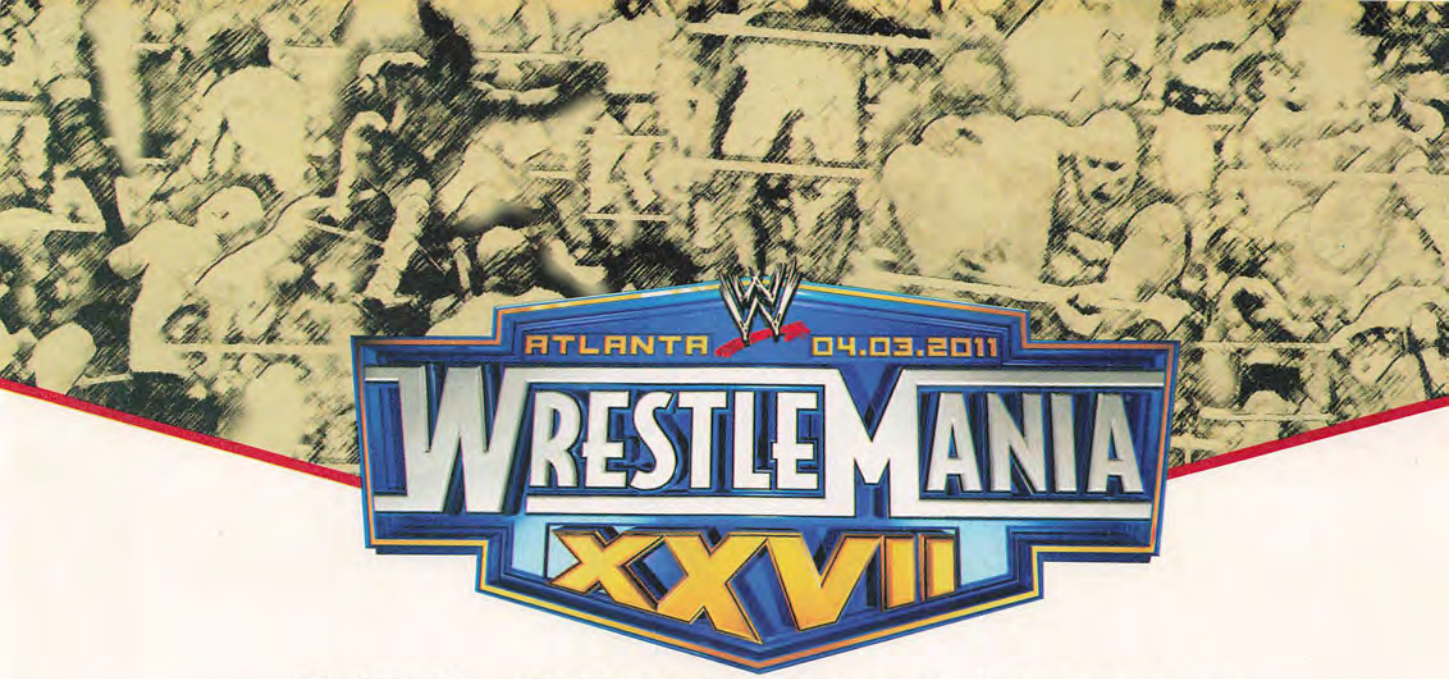
Wrestling promoters, too, are becoming more aggressive in going after pirates, said Weber. TNA already employs a company that fishes around for illegal streams of its pay-per-view events, and shuts them down. Weber also confirmed that TNA is working with WWE and other pay-per-view promoters on strategies to combat the piracy problem.

Klarman's gofightlive.tv has taken a more high-tech approach to the problem—developing its own software to find out the origin of any illegal stream, including a pirate's name, address, and telephone number. He vowed to "make an example" out of one of them soon.

But stopping pirates may take not only a reactive approach, but a proactive one. That's why Klarman said gofightlive will soon offer a subscription service that will allow customers to watch all pay-per-views offered on his site for a fixed monthly fee. Such a move would grow the entire base of paying customers and remove some of the incentive to steal certain events.

Sapolsky recently launched his own iPPV distributor, wwnlive.com, where fans get discounts on DVDs with their pay-per-view purchase.

"The more value you give your customer, the more enticed they should be to buy your product," said Sapolsky, who agrees that all wrestling promoters need to work together to sink pay-per-view pirates. "We are all helping each other out, because we are all being hurt by it." □



OUR TEAM DISSECTS EACH PERFORMANCE

AS THE BIGGEST event on the wrestling calendar, it's beneficial to watch WrestleMania at least a couple of times. Sometimes your perception of a particular match (or the card as a whole) is different if you watch it live and later watch it on DVD. Sometimes, you can watch a match on TV in a group setting and get a totally different take on it when you watch it a second time by yourself. A couple of writers who contributed to the WrestleMania analysis that follows reported back with observations they totally missed the first time around.

As we did for the first time last year, our writers were assigned a wrestler or wrestlers from WrestleMania on whom to focus their attention. With a DVD playing on their computer and an online stopwatch ready to go, the writers were asked to keep track of how long their wrestlers were in control of his or her match. They were also told to count the near-falls, note a highlight and lowlight, get a quote, and predict what the future holds in store for each participant.

Here are Team *PWI's* assignments:

Frank Krewda: Triple-H, Alberto Del Rio, Kane, Team Snooki, Team Lay-Cool

Stu Saks: Undertaker, Kofi Kingston

Dave Lenker: Edge

Dan Murphy: Wade Barrett, The Miz

Jeff Ruoss: Cody Rhodes, Jerry Lawler

Harry Burkett: Rey Mysterio Jr., John Cena

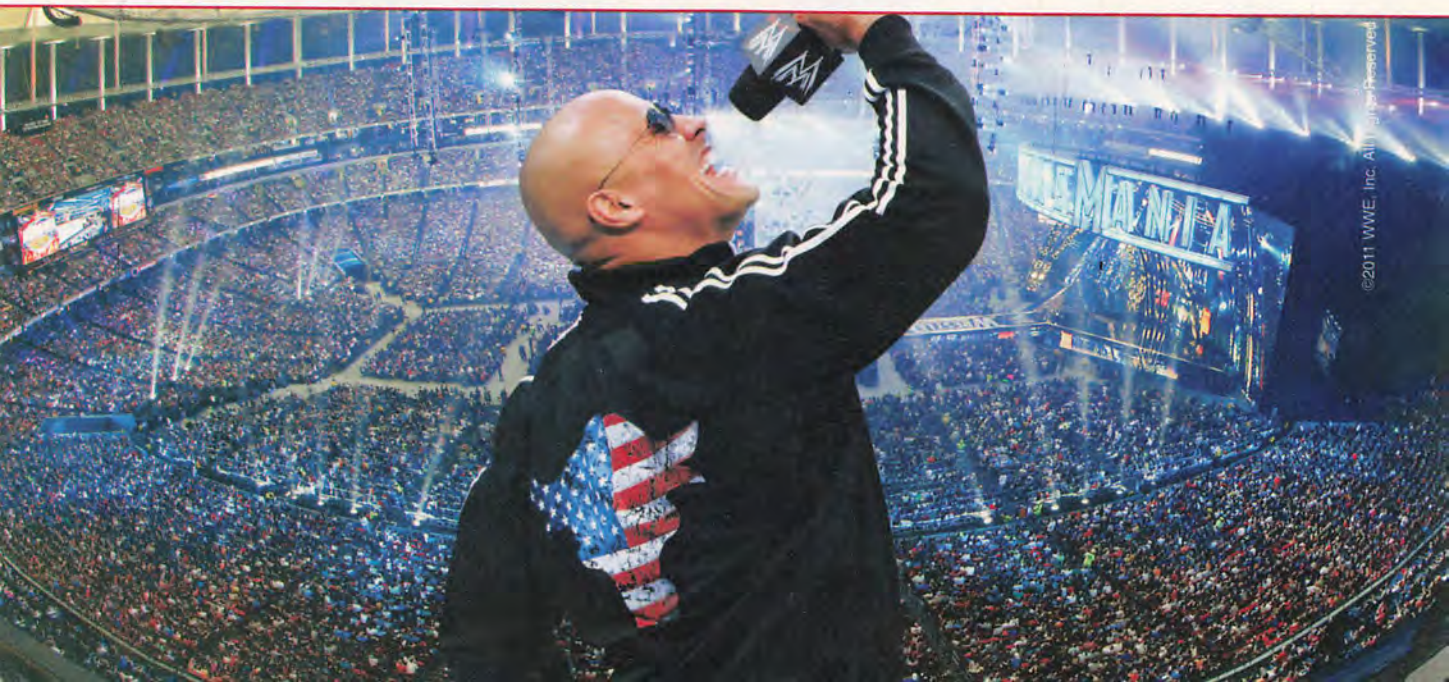
Al Castle: Ezekiel Jackson, Randy Orton

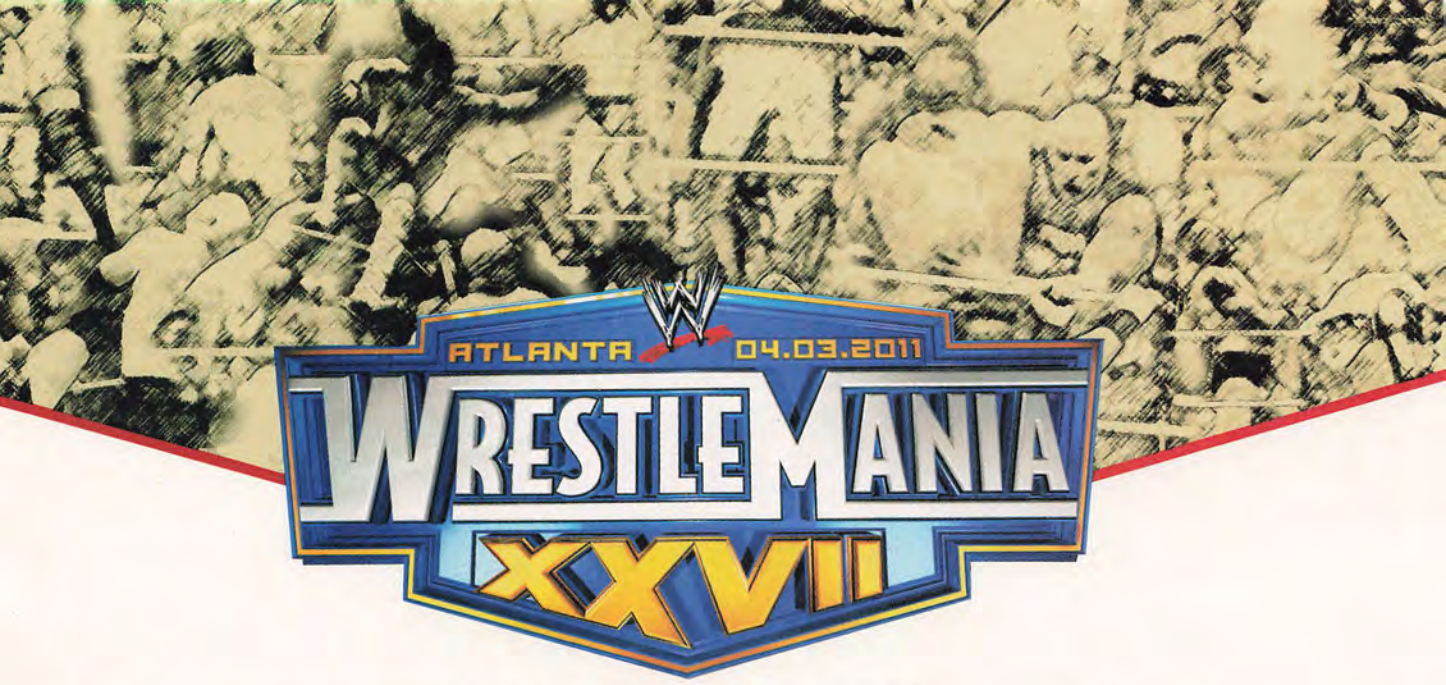
Brady Hicks: Big Show

Mike Bessler: Santino Marella

Adam Testa: Justin Gabriel, Heath Slater

Al Alven: CM Punk





EDGE

Edge's WM 27 Highlight: As cathartic as the bashing of Alberto Del Rio's Rolls-Royce after the match was for Edge, breaking his own streak of three straight World title match losses at WrestleMania (he hadn't won at 'Mania since upsetting Mick Foley in 2006) was even sweeter. He obviously had the cross-armbreaker well-scouted, as, in the end, he slipped out of it, nailed a spear, and got the clean pinfall. Actually, the huge pop for just the tease of his finisher may have been his highlight.

Edge's WM 27 Lowlight: Maybe a little too much adrenaline was flowing when Edge initially unleashed the spear. Del Rio sidestepped it, Brodus Clay followed up by ramming Edge into a ringpost, and, suddenly, Edge seemed to be in real trouble. Del Rio locked on the cross-armbreaker for the second of three times in the bout.

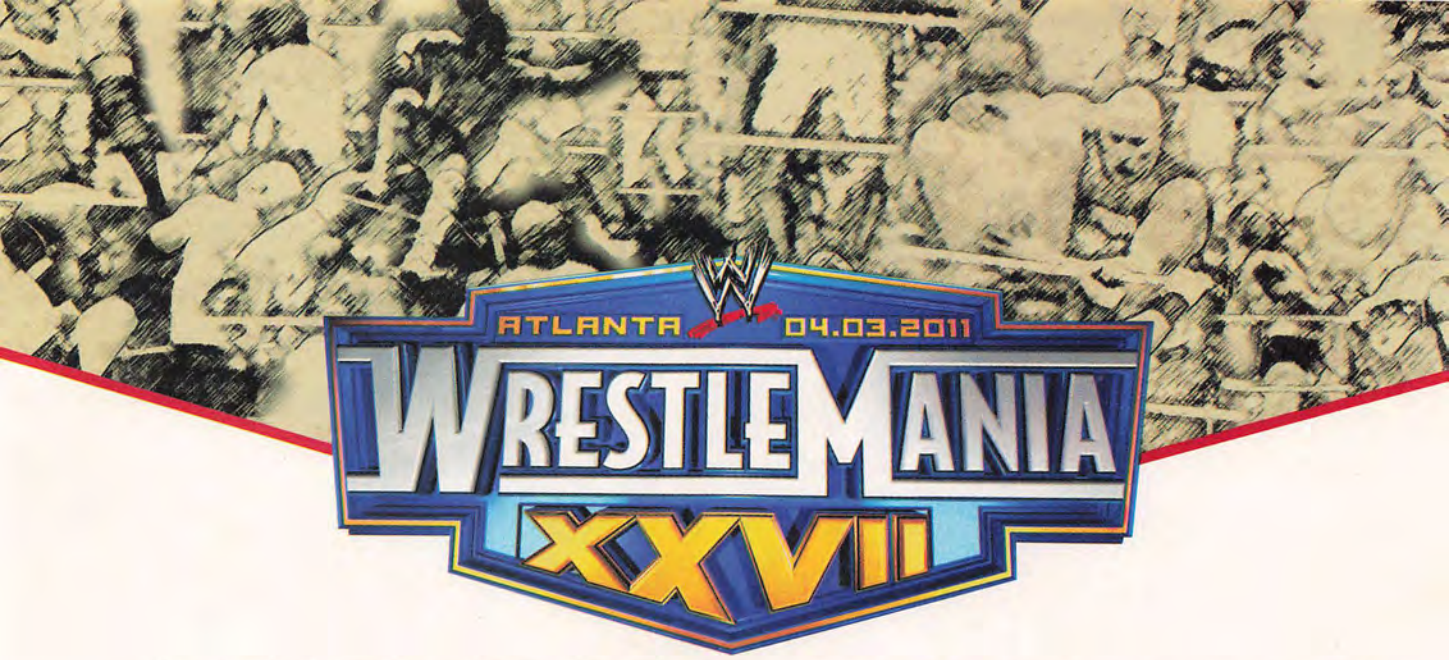
Near-Falls For Edge: 4

Total Time On Top: 5:07 (of 11:09)

Quote: "Four in a row with the World title on the line? Wasn't going to happen, folks. No way and no how if there was anything I could do, and I can do a lot. I heard how badly Triple-H wanted to end Undertaker's streak. Well, I wanted this win over Del Rio just as bad."

Edge's Post-'Mania Direction: We now know that Edge's WrestleMania performance was fueled by the knowledge that this was to be his last match. Edge had hinted at retirement several times, but wrestling at such a high level and with his popularity soaring, we thought he'd be around awhile. Knowing when to call it quits can sometimes take as much courage as wrestling with a potentially crippling injury.

Photo by George Napolitano



ALBERTO DEL RIO

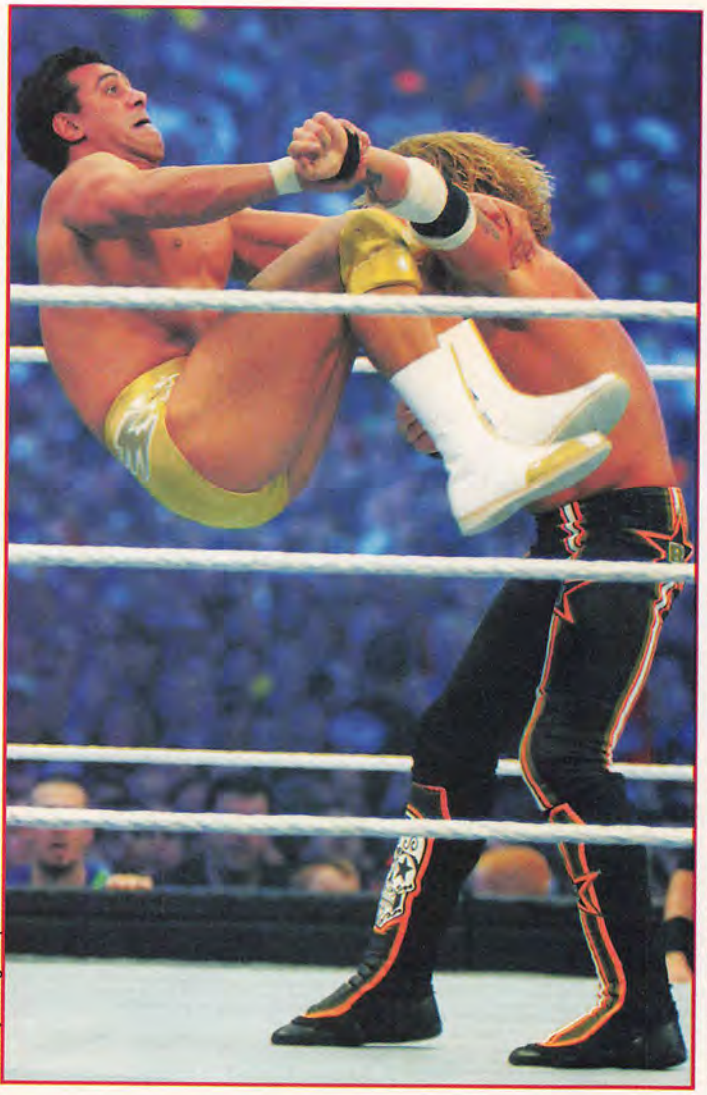


Photo by George Napolitano

Del Rio's WM 27 Highlight: Del Rio finally had Edge where he wanted when he locked on his cross-armbreaker in the center of the ring at the 9:46 mark. Del Rio had twice earlier caught the World champion in his finishing hold, but Edge fought off his first attempt, and placed his foot on the ropes on Del Rio's second attempt. A Del Rio title victory seemed certain … until Edge powered out of the hold.

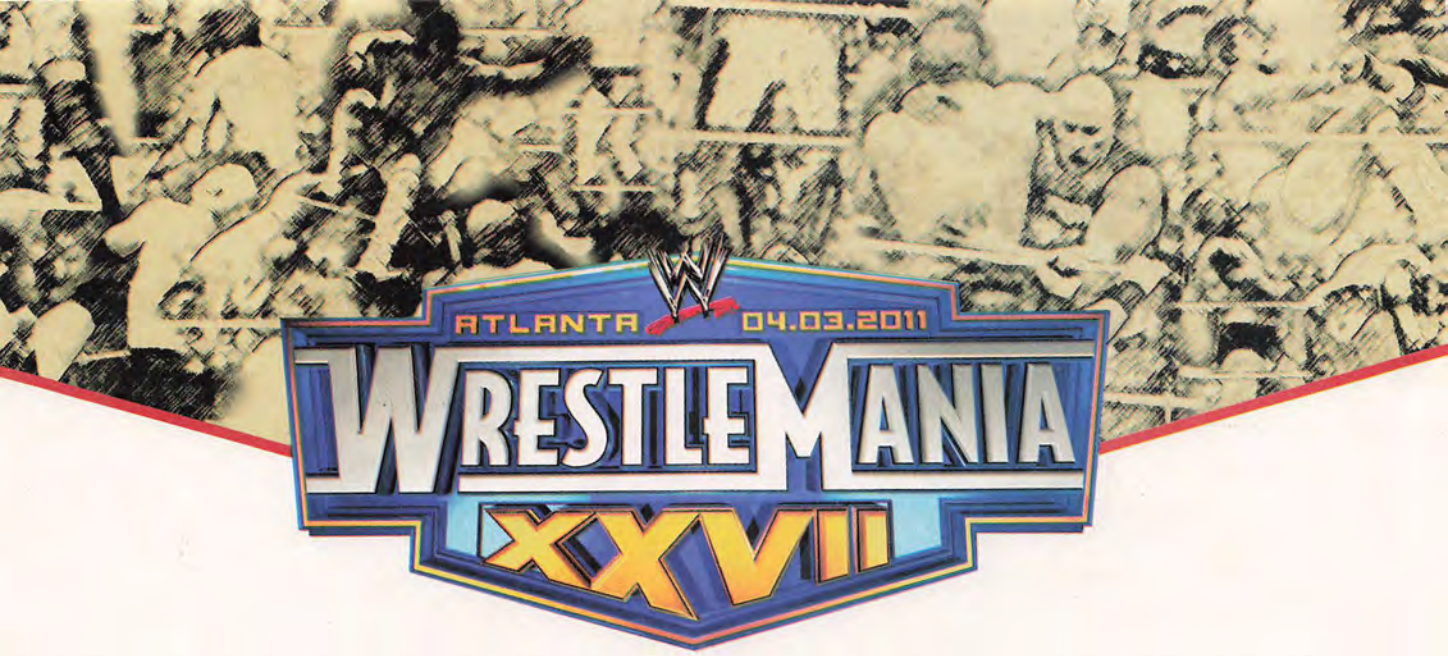
Del Rio's WM 27 Lowlight: It was difficult to discern which hurt the arrogant Mexican more—Edge's spear, which led to the pinfall—or the post-match destruction of his vehicle at the hands of Edge and Christian on the entrance ramp. Knowing how much pride Del Rio takes in his cars, we'll go with the latter.

Near-Falls For Del Rio: 4

Total Time On Top: 4:11 (of 11:09)

Quote: "Although I may have lost, it is still my destiny to be World champion. I promise, one defeat will not stop me from fulfilling my destiny. But you already know that."

Del Rio's Post-'Mania Direction: As much as fans would love to gloat about Del Rio's 'Mania failure, it should be remembered that he did nearly defeat a Hall-of-Fame caliber champion in Edge on his first WM card. Expect Del Rio to remain in the World title hunt on Smackdown, and possibly insert himself in the WWE title hunt on Raw. Though he failed to win the World title at WM27, Del Rio acquitted himself well. The constant smile on his face belies the fact that he is extremely serious about his craft. He will learn from this experience and be better for it.



CODY RHODES

Rhodes' WM 27 Highlight: Following a well-placed headbutt right to his heart from Mysterio, Rhodes kicked out of a pin attempt and rolled out of the ring. Just as Mysterio leapt to the outside to finish Rhodes, Cody nailed the former World champion with Mysterio's own knee brace. After a quick Cross-Rhodes and a three-count, Cody's hand was raised in victory.

Rhodes' WM 27 Lowlight: Cody came to the ring embarrassed by his broken nose and wore a plastic facemask to shield the world from his "hideous" new look, and to ensure Mysterio couldn't do anymore damage to his face. But, at about the 8:00 mark, Mysterio ripped the mask off Cody, placed it on his own face, and proceeded to deliver headbutt after headbutt to "The Dashing One."

Near-Falls For Rhodes: 2

Total Time On Top: 6:28 (of 11:58)

Quote: "Humiliating that carnival freak Mysterio on wrestling's grandest stage has done wonders for my confidence. I almost feel as if I'm ready to show my face to the world again."

Rhodes' Post-'Mania Direction: A victory over Mysterio at WrestleMania should indeed boost Rhodes' confidence. His performance showed that he can not only keep pace with WWE's most talented and experienced wrestlers, but also that he can beat them in high-pressure matches. He may not be ready to contend for the World title just yet. However, if Rhodes can follow up his 'Mania match with similar performances on Smackdown against credible opponents, he may just find himself occupying a higher spot on the card—and possibly contending for a title—by year's end.

Photo by George Napolitano

REY MYSTERIO JR.

Photo by George Napolitano

Mysterio's WM 27 Highlight: After wresting off Cody Rhodes' protective facemask, Mysterio made a second attempt at a 6-1-9, and nailed it, sending the second-generation star across the ring. This allowed Mysterio to follow up with kicks to Rhodes' face and even don the protective mask himself. Mysterio is showing more signs of being a wily veteran, not just a high-flying wonder, in the twilight of his career.

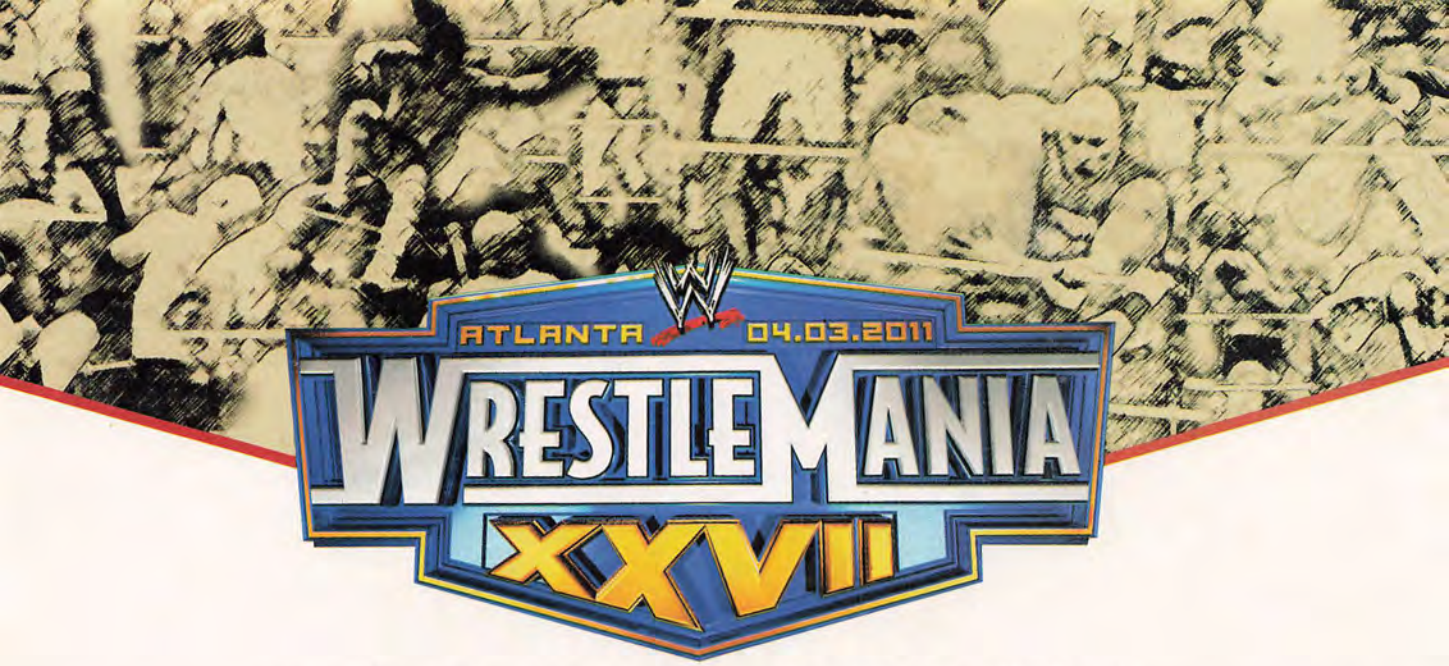
Mysterio's WM 27 Lowlight: Rhodes pried off Mysterio's knee brace and ended up smacking him in the face with it. He then executed the Cross-Rhodes for the pinfall. The final outcome punctuated the notion that Mysterio may be fading. With some fans at the Georgia Dome heckling even his signature moves, as well as Sin Cara's debut the following night on *Raw*, it could be that Mysterio's best days are behind him.

Near-Falls For Mysterio: 1

Total Time On Top: 3:37 (of 11:58)

Quote: "Yeah, I lost at WrestleMania, and I apologize to my fans for that. But Cody had to cheat by hitting me with my knee brace. Cody has a victory … but he stole it. How can he brag about that?"

Mysterio's Post-'Mania Direction: The inevitable comparisons between Mysterio and Sin Cara began as soon as the younger luchador signed with WWE in February. Now comes word that Mysterio may be taking time off. He's still dealing with nagging injuries and would like to spend more time with his family. But with the Cena-Rock dream match already set for WM28, wouldn't it be hard for WWE to resist a Mysterio-Sin Cara dream match for the same event?



THE BIG SHOW/ SANTINO MARELLA

Big Show's WM 27 Highlight: The Big Show was a dominant force in the eight-man tag match, sending Heath Slater eight feet into the air with a back-body-drop before hitting him with a knockout punch to bring the match to a quick and decisive end.

Big Show's WM 27 Lowlight: The Corre's big man, Ezekiel Jackson, was able to get to The Big Show and had him reeling early in the match after Show had decimated Slater.

Near-Falls For Big Show: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:28 (of 1:32)

Quote: "Barrett and his boys aren't so tough when the sides are even, are they? "

Big Show's Post-'Mania Direction: Now that he got some revenge on Barrett and The Corre, it is hard to predict where Show will direct his energies. A logical step would be to continue partnering with Kane to eventually relieve Slater and Justin Gabriel of the WWE tag title.

•

Marella's WM 27 Highlight: In the midst of a full-on melee, Marella introduced Heath Slater to The Cobra, clearing the way for The Big Show to score a big right hand and pinfall.

Marella's WM 27 Lowlight: Upon hearing the opening bell, Santino bounded across the ring and attempted a flying kick on Slater that missed badly, giving Slater a brief advantage.

Near-Falls For Marella: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:05 (of 1:32)

Quote: "The Corre learned once and for good that the bite of The Cobra is swift and stingy."

Santino's Post-'Mania Direction: As his comedic standing continues to grow, fans should expect to see more of the same bumbling and stumbling from the "Milan Miracle." Santino has found his niche. The fans eat up his hijinx, and he seems quite content to humor them. There's no reason to expect Marella to go on a sudden demonstration of wrestling wizardry.

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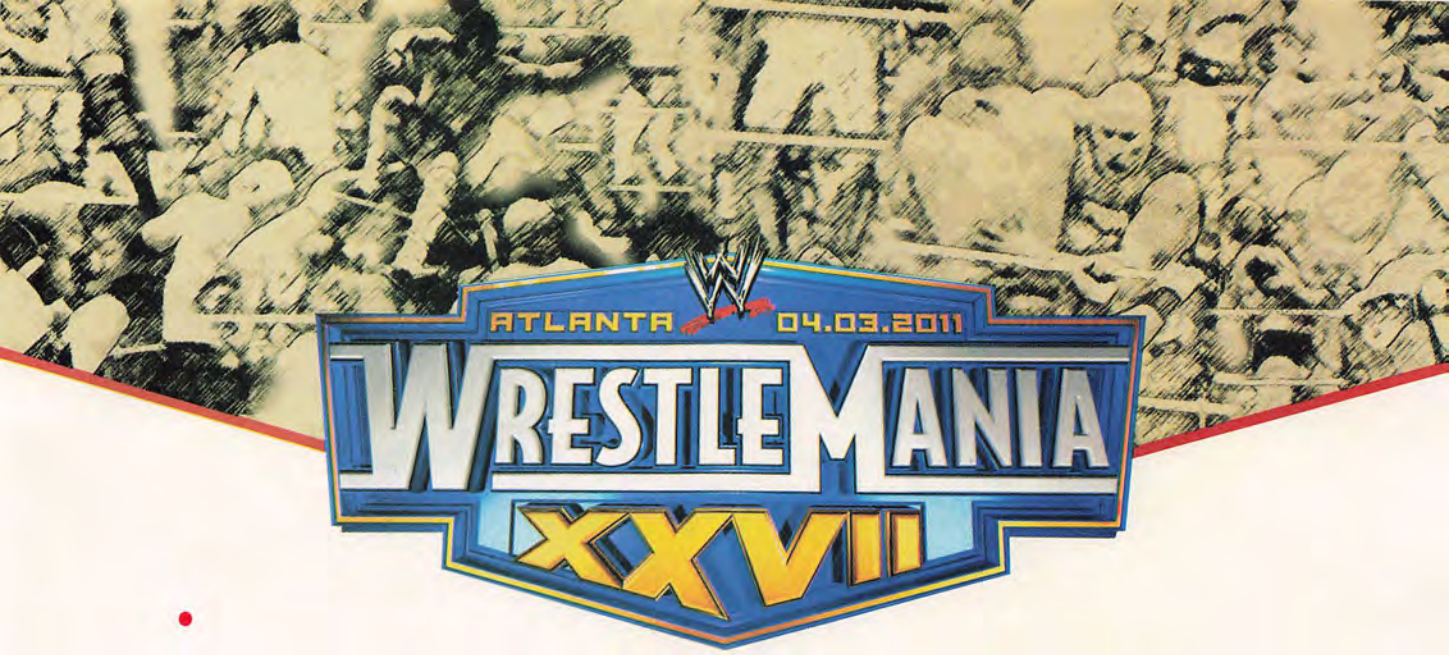
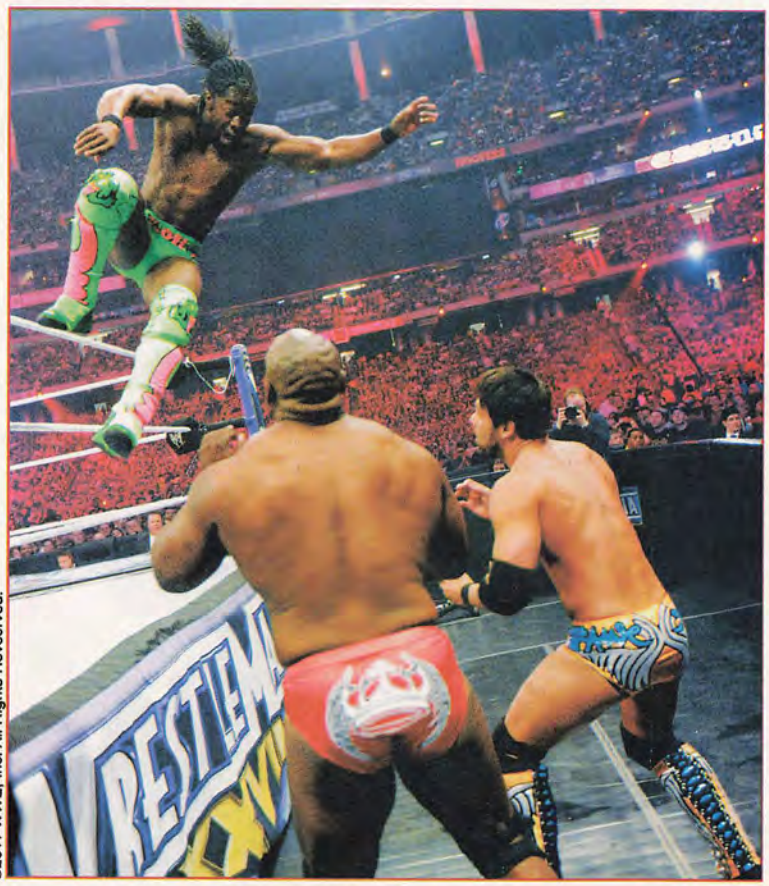


KANE/ KOFI KINGSTON

Kane's WM 27 Highlight: After Ezekiel Jackson laid out The Big Show with an illegal clothesline, Kane delivered an illegal top-rope clothesline of his own to "Zeke" before catching Justin Gabriel with a crushing uppercut just after Gabriel descended from the top rope.



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Kane's WM 27 Lowlight: Kane's brief tear was ended by a big boot to the face from Wade Barrett that sent him rolling meekly out of the ring.

Near-Falls For Kane: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:06 (of 1: 32)

Quote: "I didn't even care about the tag belts. Just beating up on Gabriel and Jackson was good enough for me."

Kane's Post-'Mania Direction: Since he admittedly doesn't care about winning the tag title, and another run as World champion doesn't seem likely, chances are Kane will go back to being WWE's resident monster, and terrorizing the rest of the roster on both brands.

Kingston's WM 27 Highlight: Kofi went two-for-two to help set up his team's winning rally: a Trouble in Paradise against Wade Barrett and a running tackle from the ring apron on Justin Gabriel and Ezekiel Jackson, who went down like the six and 10 pins on the arena floor.

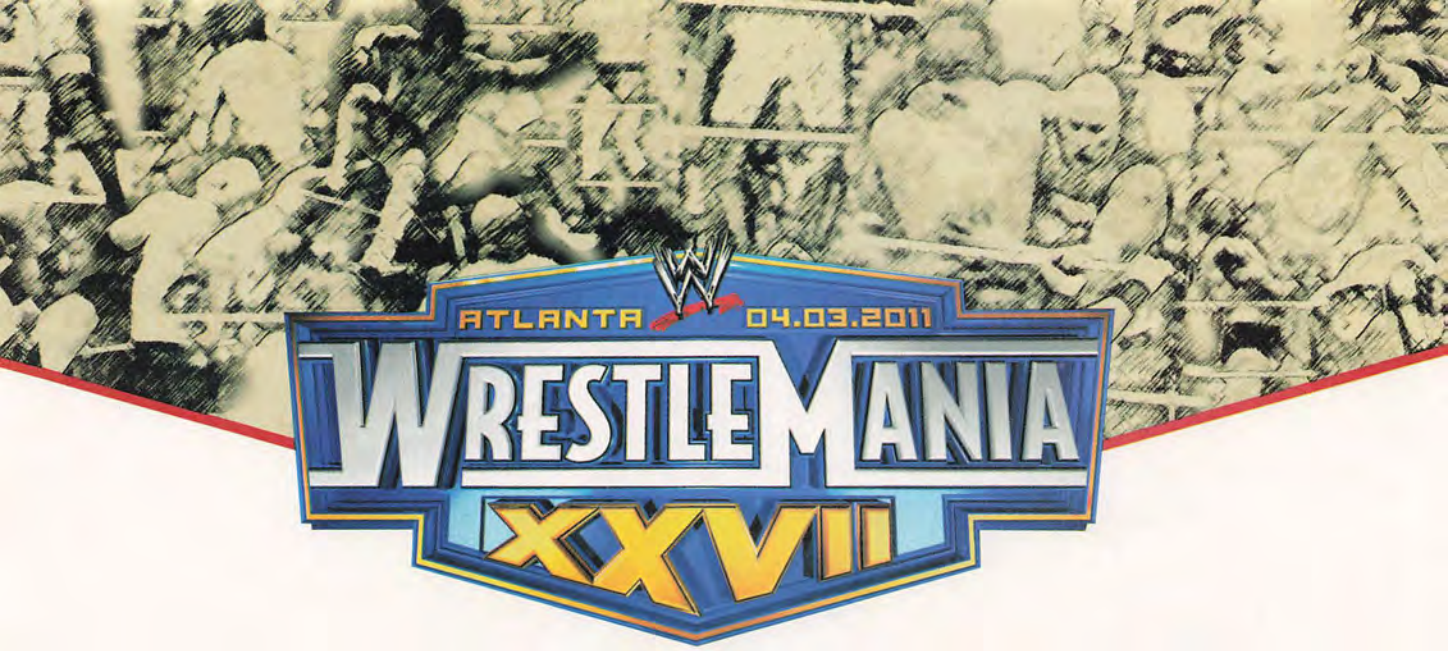
Kingston's WM 27 Lowlight: None

Near-Falls For Kingston: 0

Total Time on Top: 0:13 (of 1:32)

Quote: "Did The Corre really think they were doing themselves a favor by taking out Vlad Kozlov before WrestleMania. I was pretty fired up about the way they stole my Intercontinental title."

Kingston's Post-'Mania Direction: Directly at Barrett, preferably in a cage match, where The Corre cannot be a factor.



JUSTIN GABRIEL/ EZEKIEL JACKSON

Gabriel's WM 27 Highlight: The highlight of Gabriel's first WrestleMania appearance has to be the fact he even had a spot on the card. He never landed an offensive maneuver.

Gabriel's WM 27 Lowlight: As Gabriel looked for some aerial offense, he instead found a strong right hand from Kane. Only seconds later, while on the outside with Ezekiel Jackson, he'd be on the receiving end of a dive from Kofi Kingston, leaving him unable to save partner Heath Slater from being pinned by Big Show.

Near-Falls For Gabriel: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:00 (of 1:32)

Quote: "We may have lost tonight, but the tag titles are still ours, and no one is taking them away."

Gabriel's Post-'Mania Direction: Gabriel didn't perform any worse than Corre leader Wade Barrett, so any complaints from the faction's upper management are rendered invalid. Besides, he still wears a belt.

•

Jackson's WM 27 Highlight: Jackson floored The Big Show with a devastating clothesline.

Jackson's WM 27 Lowlight: After being sent out of the ring by Kane, Jackson and Justin Gabriel found themselves on the receiving end of a flying bodypress from Kofi Kingston, and the big man easily went down.

Near-Falls For Jackson: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:03 (1:32)

Quote: "They let those punks make a substitution on their team. If you don't see the conspiracy, you're blind."

Jackson's Post-'Mania Direction: The Corre's lackluster showing at WrestleMania could be an indication that The Corre is not long for WWE. That might not be bad for Jackson. As the only member of The Corre who wasn't previously in The Nexus, fans might very well accept Jackson as a solo act.

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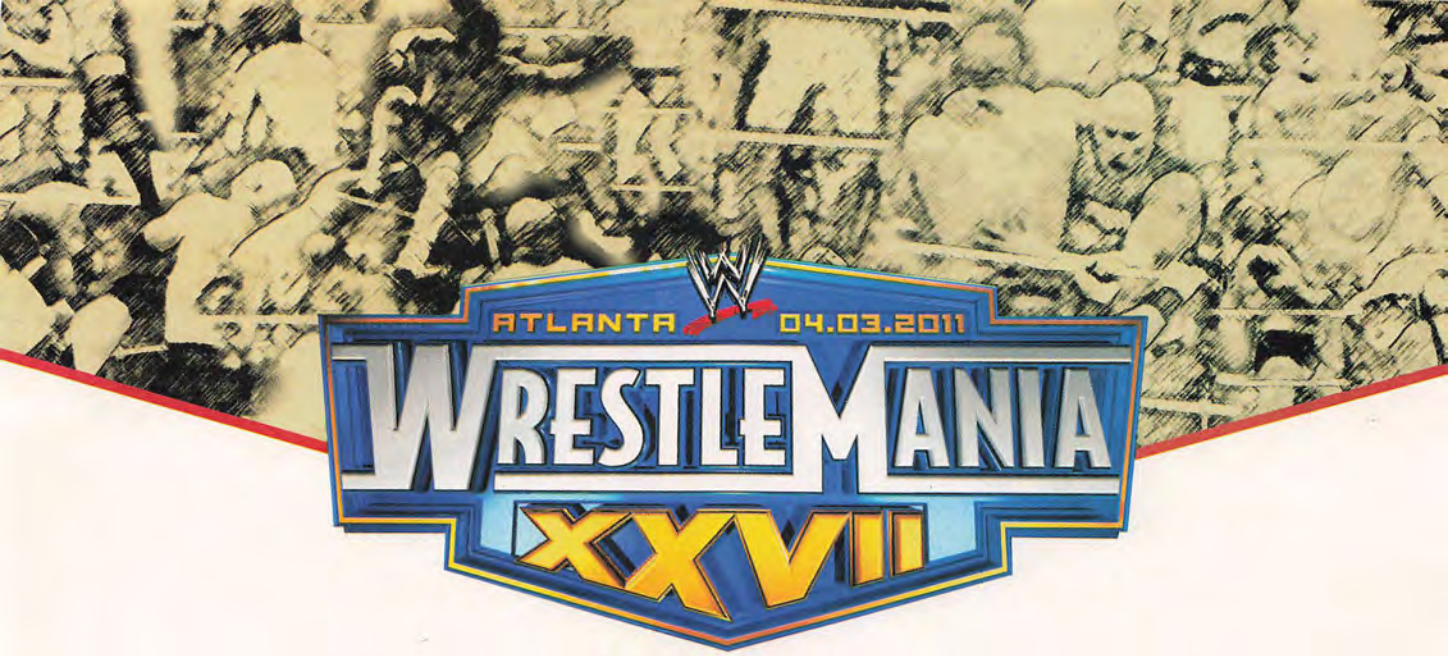

WADE BARRETT/ HEATH SLATER

Barrett's WM 27 Highlight: Having taken out Ezekiel Jackson and Justin Gabriel, Kane was threatening to single-handedly destroy The Corre until Barrett stopped the onslaught with a boot to the face.

Barrett's WM 27 Lowlight: Immediately after sending Kane out of the ring, Barrett turned into a Trouble in Paradise kick from Kofi Kingston.

Near-Falls For Barrett: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:03 (of 1:32)

Quote: "The Corre was victimized by biased matchmaking. If Vladimir Kozlov was unable to be there, they should have been forced to compete short-handed. Kingston was an illegal substitution!"

Barrett's Post-'Mania Direction: Even though Barrett and The Corre may have come up small, Wade is still the I-C champ and will find no shortage of challengers. It's time for Barrett to start behaving like a champion, and not a thug.

•

Slater's WM 27 Highlight: The "One-Man Rock Band" found himself riding the early momentum, starting the match by pummeling Santino.

Slater's WM 27 Lowlight: Getting caught by Santino's Cobra is embarrassing; having it followed with a kayo punch from Big Show is painful. Not a flattering sequence for Slater at all.

Near-Falls for Slater: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:15 (of 1:32)

Quote: "I tried to get our team off to a fast start, but I just couldn't adapt once Big Show got involved. We were totally out of sync tonight."

Slater's Post-'Mania Direction: Slater's loss may not sit well with his Corre cohorts, as he could arguably be seen as the weak link. His insurance policy lies with the WWE tag team title, but Barrett has commanded his troops to drop the belts for the betterment of his faction in the past, so anything is possible.

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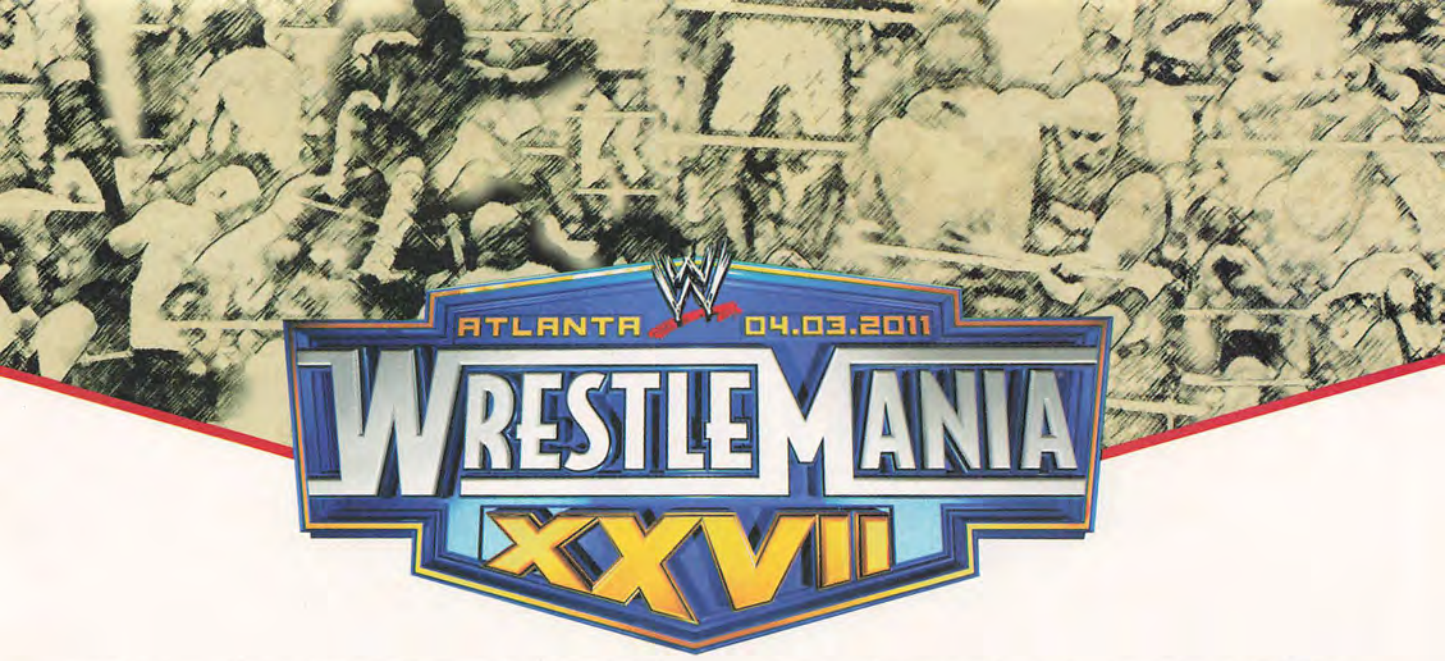


RANDY ORTON

Orton's WM 27 Highlight: Orton had been itching for months to catch his arch-rival, CM Punk, in his RKO finisher. And on the biggest stage in the sport, he finally got his wish. After escaping one RKO attempt, a smug Punk climbed to the top rope and went for a flying clothesline. Orton had the presence of mind to catch Punk in mid-air and lay him out with the RKO for the win.

Orton's WM 27 Lowlight: Perhaps the only thing Orton wanted to do more than give Punk an RKO was to punt kick him in the skull. When the opportunity presented itself late in the match, Orton went for it. But, just as it did six days earlier on *Raw*, Orton's injured right leg gave out as he set up the kick, and he fell to the ground. It was a humiliating moment for Orton, who prides himself on looking near invincible. Here he looked almost feeble.

Near-Falls For Orton: 2

Total Time On Top: 5:20 (of 14:47)

Quote: "Part of me was a little sad after the ref counted to three, because it meant I had to stop pounding on that worm."

Orton's Post-'Mania Direction: Orton should certainly expect to hear from a revenge-seeking Punk in the near future. However, it would be wise for Orton to leave this feud in the past and re-dedicate himself to capturing a WWE world championship. A switch to Smackdown, where he could target the World title, would be an unexpected and exciting development. A return to his heel persona would also keep opponents on their toes.

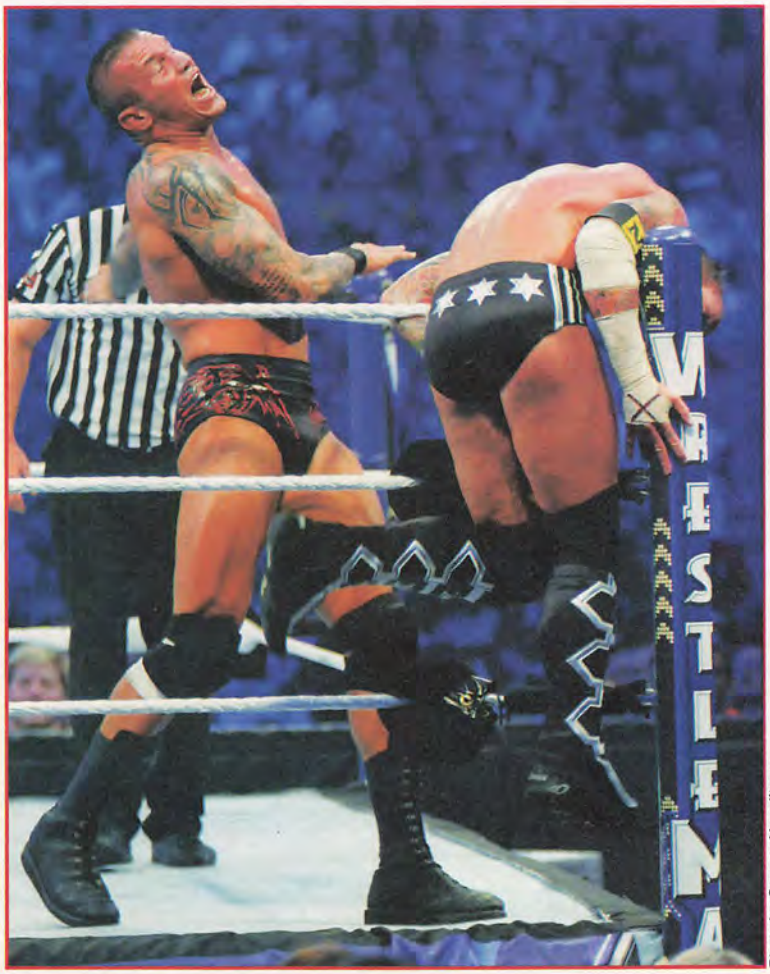


Photo by George Napolitano

CM PUNK

Punk's WM 27 Highlight: After relentlessly working over Randy Orton's injured right knee during the early going, Punk caught Orton in a Tree of Woe position in the corner. Punk ascended the top rope right above Orton and dropped straight down with a vicious kneedrop onto Randy's chest. The huge Georgia Dome crowd let out a gasp in reaction to one of the hardest-hitting moves in this ultra-physical contest. The resulting pin attempt garnered only a two-count, but, at that point, victory for Punk seemed inevitable.

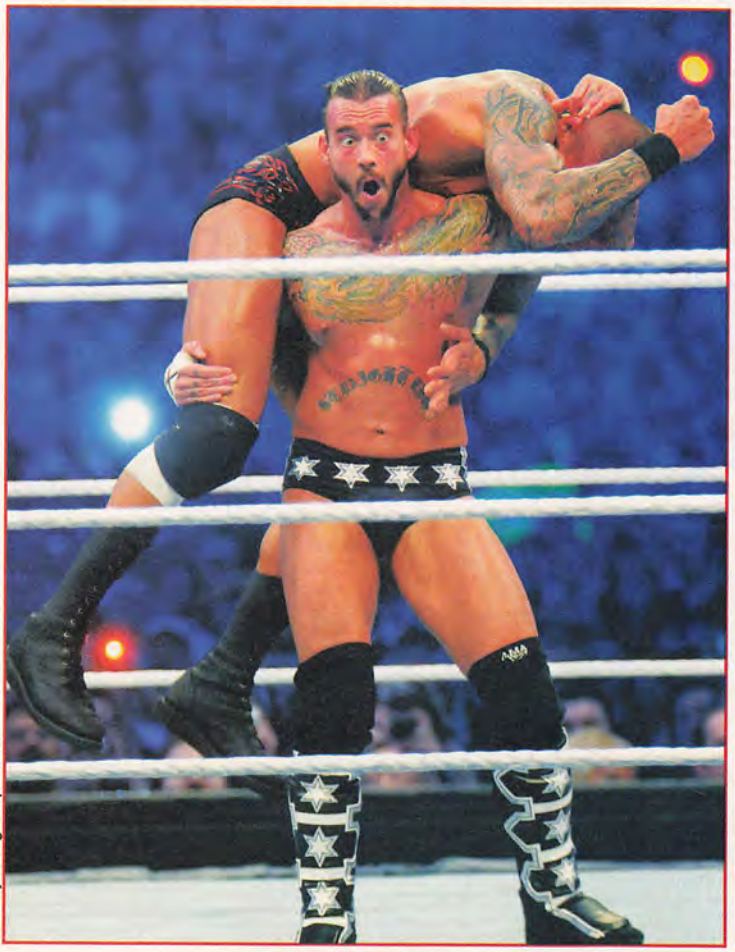


Photo by George Napolitano

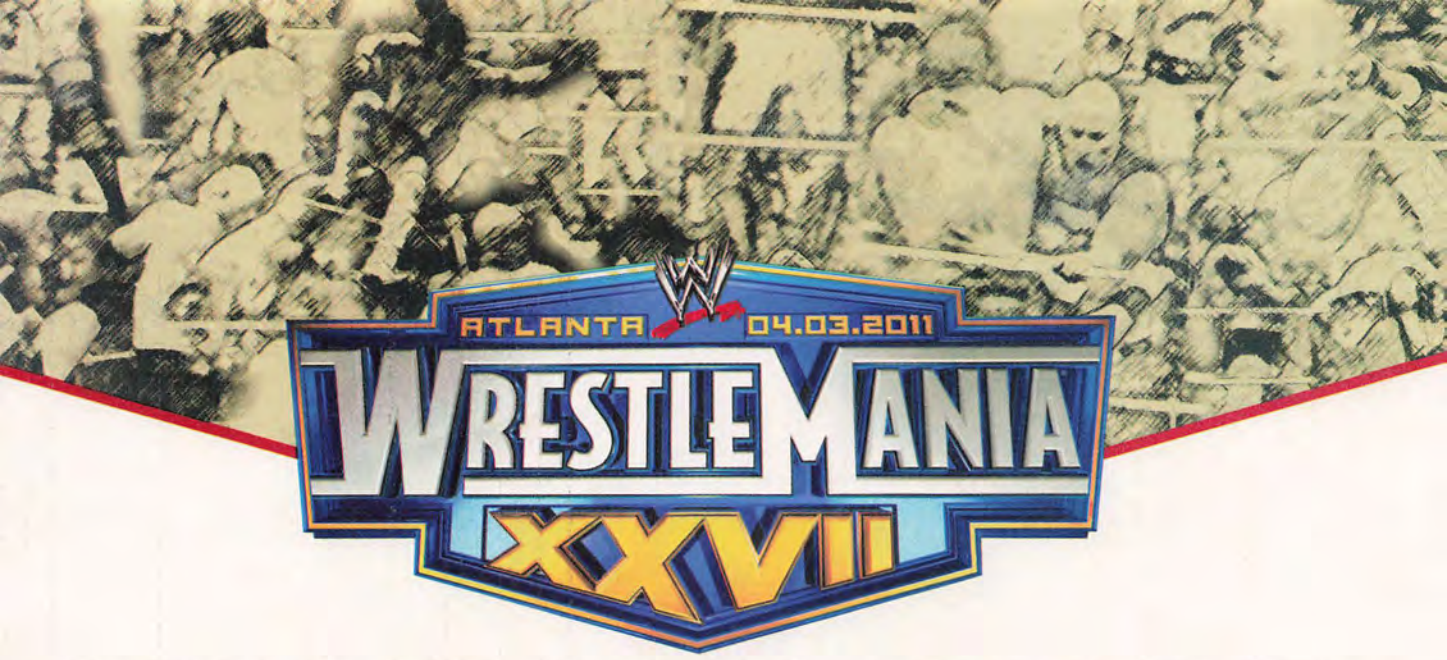
Punk's WM 27 Lowlight: Orton crumpled to the mat, his knee giving out just as he was about to level Punk with his patented punt to the head. Instead of taking advantage, Punk laughed at Orton's misfortune, moved in slowly, and just barely avoided a desperation RKO attempt by rolling to the ring apron. After regaining his composure, Punk tried for a springboard clothesline. Again, Orton was waiting, this time scoring with the RKO for the victory. Punk had his rival down and out for an extended period, and played right into Orton's trap.

Near-Falls For Punk: 4

Total Time On Top: 8:05 (of 14:47)

Quote: "Orton, I completely dominated you, and you know it. I came this close to destroying your knee, to ending you. I promise you, I will finish the job."

Punk's Post-'Mania Direction: In a feud that saw his Nexus faction decimated and included a WrestleMania loss, it's hard to imagine that Punk has gotten his hatred for Orton entirely out of his system. This feud may not resume at the same level of intensity post-'Mania, but Punk and Orton have certainly not seen the last of each other.



MICHAEL COLE

Cole's WM 27 Highlight: After getting the stuffing beaten out of him by Jerry "The King" Lawler to the sincere amusement of guest referee "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, the obnoxious Cole was able to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat when the mysterious, anonymous Raw General Manager intervened via e-mail. Although Cole originally lost the bout by pinfall, the GM declared that due to Austin abusing his authority as ref, Lawler had been disqualified and Michael Cole was the winner.

Cole's WM 27 Lowlight: Despite the fact that Cole tapped out at almost the very instant Lawler slapped on the anklelock, a gleeful "Stone-Cold" decided to have a little fun with the *Raw* play-by-play man, pretending he couldn't tell whether he was submitting or not. As Cole writhed in pain and cried out to the end the match, Austin got a kick out of watching him suffer for a bit before finally calling for the bell.

Near-Falls For Cole: 1

Total Time On Top: 5:31 (of 13:45)

Quote: "I don't know how anyone expected me to have a fair chance against Lawler with an obviously biased referee like Austin in there. I'm just glad the GM decided to be the voice of reason here and correct a grievous miscarriage of justice."

Cole's Post-'Mania Direction: As awkward as it may be at this point, Cole must try his best to go back to co-existing with Lawler at the broadcast table. If his WrestleMania in-ring debut taught us anything, it's that Michael Cole has no future whatsoever as a wrestler, singlet and headgear or not. His best bet would be to stick to calling the action each week on *Raw* ... and doing it carefully, lest he earn another beatdown from "The King."

Photo by George Napolitano

JERRY LAWLER

Lawler's WM 27 Highlight: With a giant Memphis-sized smile on his face, Lawler reared forward and turned Michael Cole's ankle another click to the wrong direction. Finally having taken all he could, Cole begged and cried for the match to end, giving "The King" the satisfaction of hearing him beg for mercy. And while this is the obvious choice as Lawler's WrestleMania 27 highlight, the real highlight is that after 26 years, "The King" was finally given an opportunity to perform on wrestling's grandest stage.

Lawler's WM 27 Lowlight: Barely even having time to enjoy a good Booker T Spinaroonie or an ice-cold Steve-weiser, "The King's" long-awaited WrestleMania glory was shattered by the chime of the anonymous Raw GMs computer. A push by guest referee "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin meant that Jerry Lawler would be disqualified, and Michael Cole was now your winner.

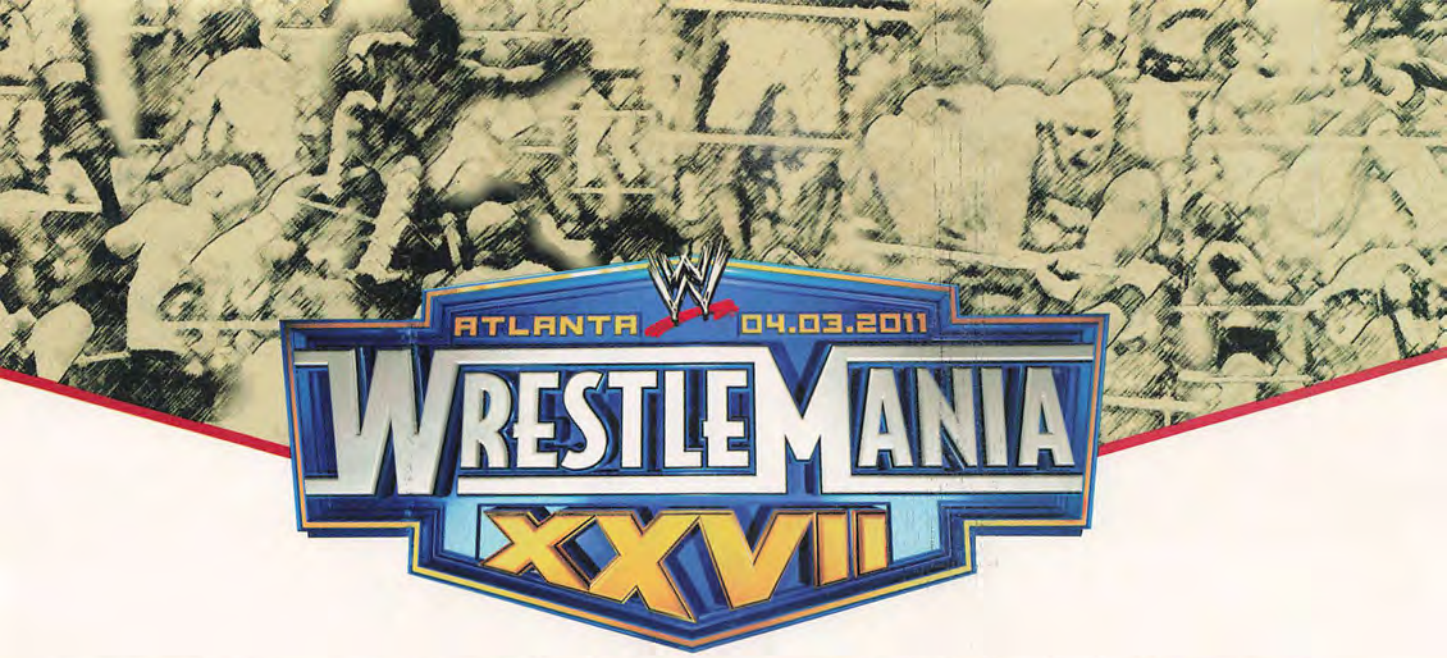
Photo by George Napolitano

Near-Falls For Lawler: 1

Total Time On Top: 5:36 (of 13:45)

Quote: "No matter what that computer says, we all know who really won this match. Cole better watch out, because no matter how deep the 'Cole Mine' is, he can't hide forever."

Lawler's Post-'Mania Direction: After avenging his 'Mania loss the next night on *Raw*, it appears as if Lawler, having finally performed at 'Mania, will settle back into his announcer's chair to call the action on Monday nights. Still, something tells us that one night in the not-too-distant future, Cole will say something stupid that prompts Lawler to shed the headset, reach across the table, and go upside Cole's head.



THE UNDERTAKER

Undertaker's WM 27 Highlight: About 4½ minutes into the match, Triple-H ripped the monitors out of the main announce table, dragged Undertaker on top, and attempted would could have been a nose-breaking Pedigree. 'Taker found the strength to turn the move into a back-bodydrop, sending HHH from the table to the floor, where he would writhe in agony for a full minute. Meanwhile, a groggy Undertaker stood in the ring waiting for Triple-H to get to his feet. When he did, UT ran across the ring and did a swan dive over the top rope toward his foe. He didn't hit Triple-H with full force, but he did send a clear message that he was going to will himself to outperform his body on this night.

Undertaker's WM 27 Lowlight: At the 17-minute mark, Triple-H reversed an attempted Tombstone piledriver atop a folded metal chair into a DDT. HHH hit Undertaker with his second and third Pedigrees of the match over the next three minutes, but was unable to secure the pin. HHH delivered nine straight chair shots to a prone 'Taker's back and moved to the opposite side of the ring, waiting for his opponent's next move. The Undertaker pulled himself to his feet and rushed across the ring, his arms down. Triple-H took advantage, slamming the chair right across 'Taker's face.

Near-Falls For The Undertaker: 2

Total Time On Top: 8:59 (of 29:32)

Quote: Undertaker could not be reached as of press time.

Undertaker's Post-'Mania Direction: This man is at a point in his career where he has earned the right to take off the entire year leading to WrestleMania 28. Undertaker had a down 2010 after his Match of the Year performance against Shawn Michaels at WM 27. Maybe he can only get up for WrestleMania. Given the choice of WrestleMania 28 or retirement, there's little doubt what Vince McMahon would decide.

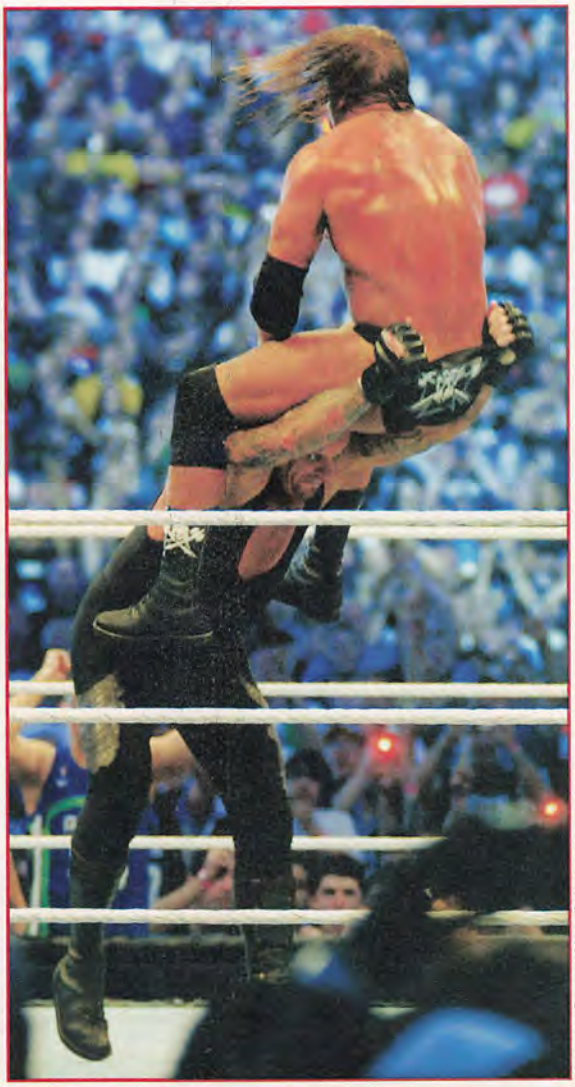


Photo by George Napolitano

TRIPLE-H

Triple-H's WM 27 Highlight: Just as The Undertaker seemed poised to go on the offensive at 17:01, Triple-H planted UT with an electrifying DDT onto a steel chair, swinging the momentum back in his favor and temporarily forestalling anymore punishment to his body. After already having suffered a Last Ride power bomb and a Tombstone piledriver, another big move from 'Taker could have finished Triple-H's night right then and there.

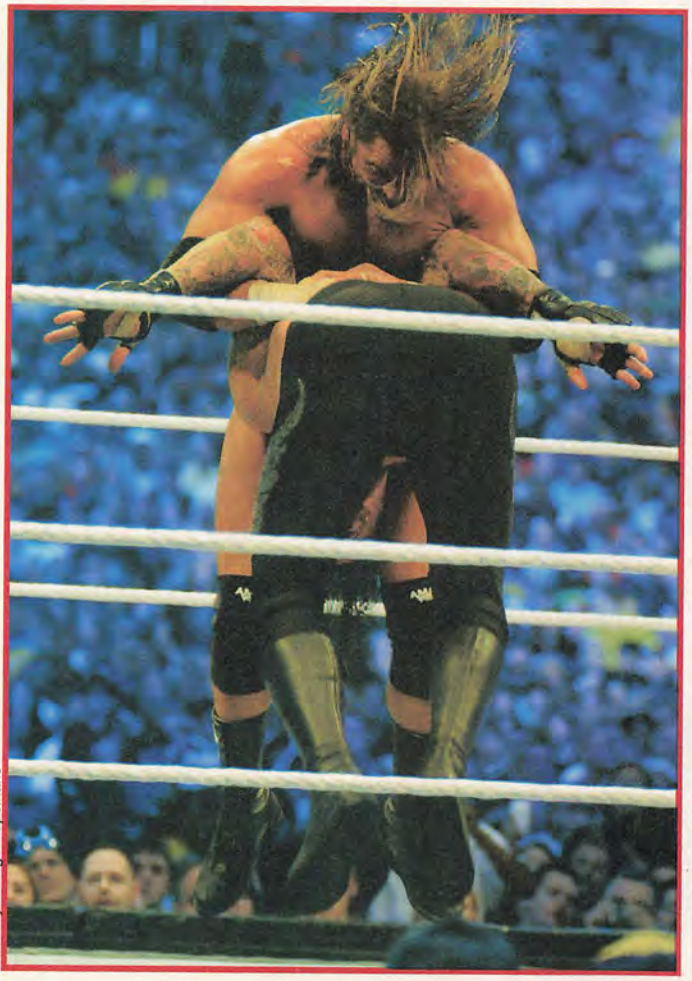


Photo by George Napolitano

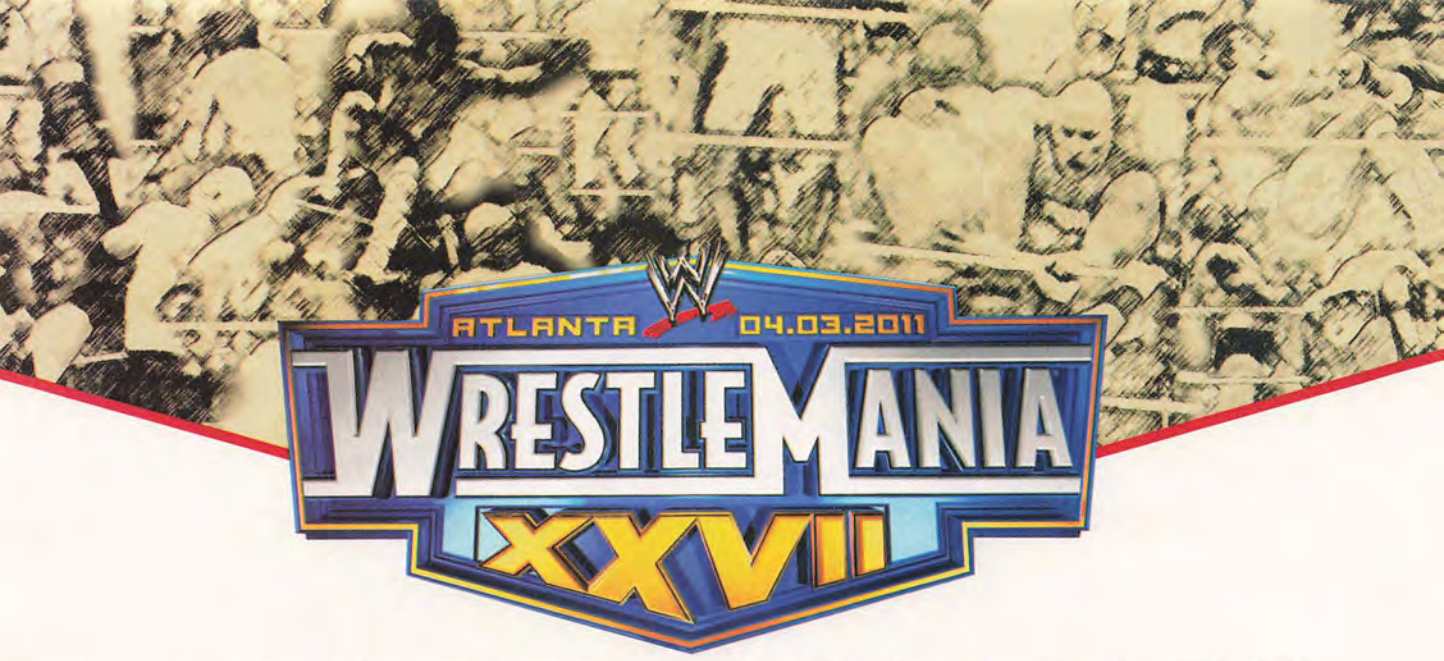
Triple-H's WM 27 Lowlight: Triple-H had just executed a Tombstone piledriver to UT, then went for the cover, crossing 'Taker's arms and sticking out his tongue just like the "Dead Man" himself. Somehow, 'Taker managed to kick out at two, and all signs of confidence drained from Helmsley's demeanor. Helmsley immediately scampered away from The Undertaker with fear in his eyes, as if he were in the ring with some super-human life form. Never before had Triple-H ever looked so scared in a ring.

Time On Top For Triple-H: 6:46 (of 29:32)

Near-Falls For Triple-H: 5

Quote: "They call him the 'Dead Man' for a reason. You saw me unload everything I had on him out there. Damnit, the guy is indestructible!"

Triple-H's Post-'Mania Direction: A few years ago, there's no doubt Triple-H would have been just dying to get revenge on The Undertaker immediately after 'Mania. Apparently, the older and wiser Triple-H understands the virtues of patience and discretion. He claims he'll be waiting for UT when he makes his inevitable return, but with even greater responsibilities in the WWE office, the duties of fatherhood, and wear-and-tear working on his body, we're sure Triple-H will be willing to bide his time.



TEAM SNOOKI

(NICOLE "SNOOKI" POLIZZI, TRISH STRATUS, JOHN MORRISON)

Team Snooki's WM 27 Highlight: After teammate Trish Stratus had worn down Michelle McCool and neutralized Layla, she tagged in Snooki, who, to the surprise of just about everyone viewing, executed a cartwheel and drop on McCool in the opposite corner before scoring the pin on the former Divas champion. Not only hadn't Snooki embarrassed herself in the ring, she scored the match-winning pinfall.

Team Snooki's WM 27 Lowlight: While battling McCool on the top turnbuckle, Stratus and McCool tumbled to the ring apron, then onto the floor. Trish appeared to get the worst of the fall, and also found herself outnumbered by McCool and Layla on that side of the ring.

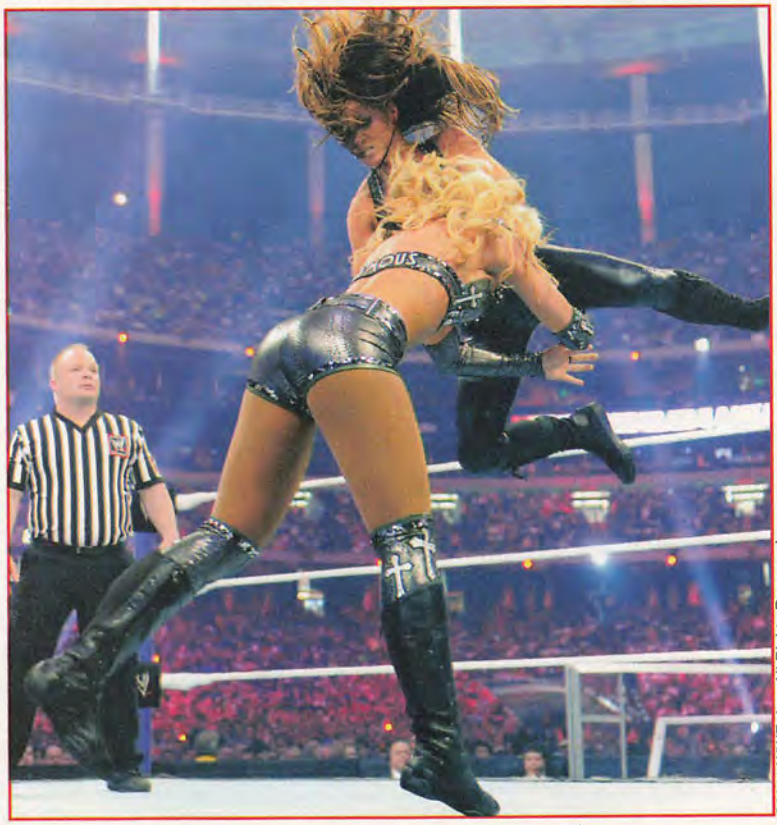
Near-Falls For Team Snooki: 2

Total Time on Top: 2:03 (of 3:17)

Quote: "I am so happy I was able to do more than just stand around while Trish and John did all the work," said Snooki. "Being able to contribute and actually help win the match was an awesome feeling."

Team Snooki's Post-'Mania Direction: For Morrison, WM 27 was just another card. Not much will change for him coming out of the show. Expect Morrison to continue in his attempt to jump from Raw's mid-card to upper-card by feuding with the likes of Dolph Ziggler, and possibly The Miz.

While Stratus has plenty of projects in the works outside of professional wrestling, she seemed to thoroughly enjoy herself on Raw and at 'Mania. Don't rule out future WWE appearances over the summer and fall. Snooki, who had publicly professed an interest in becoming a full-time WWE Diva, has since cooled on those plans, and is reportedly back to work on *The Jersey Shore* and other commitments. At 4'9", that's probably a wise choice!



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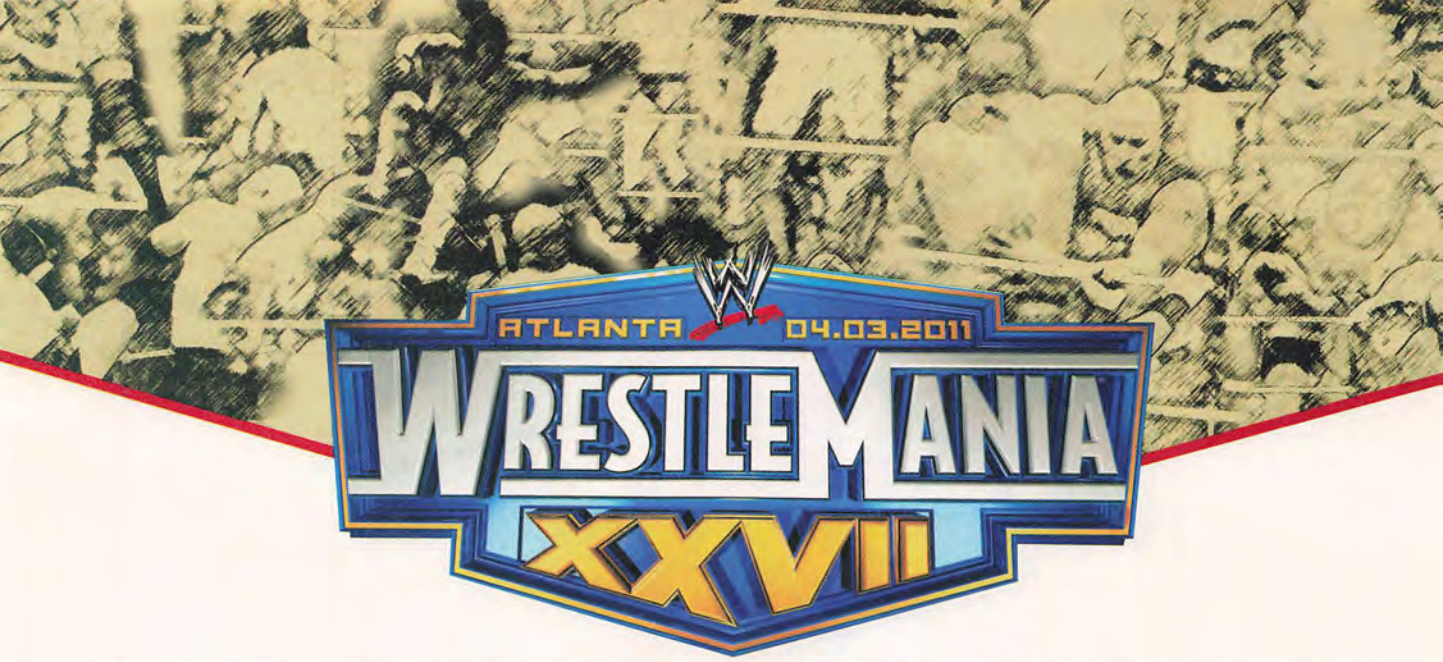
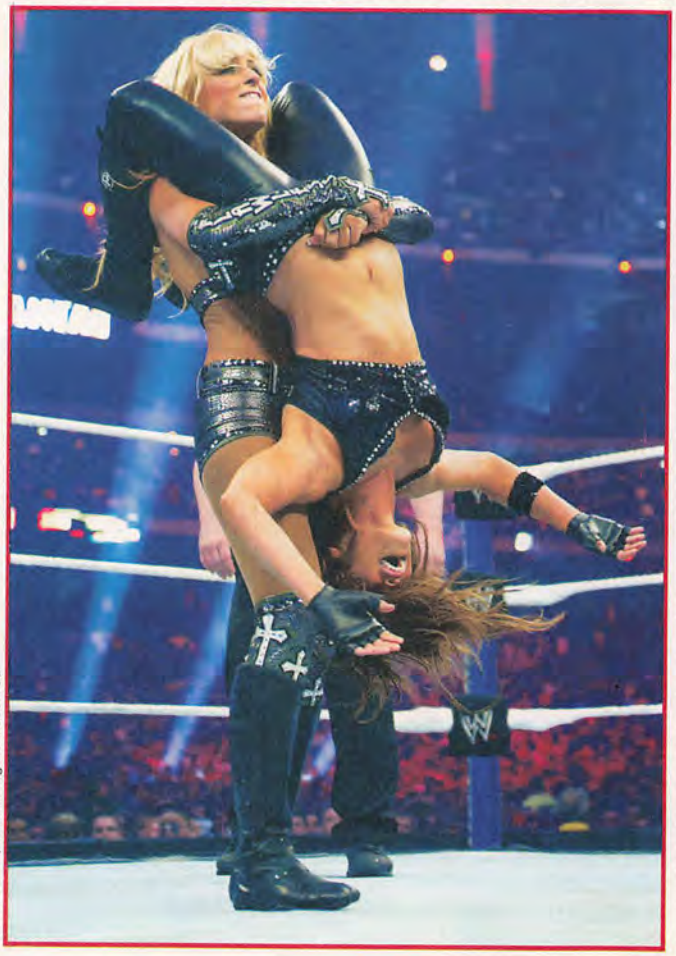


TEAM LAY-COOL

(LAYLA, MICHELLE McCOOL, DOLPH ZIGGLER)

Team Lay-Cool's WM 27 Highlight: Michelle McCool pummeled Trish Stratus with kicks and punches for a fleeting moment early in the match, but that was as good as it got for any member of the team.



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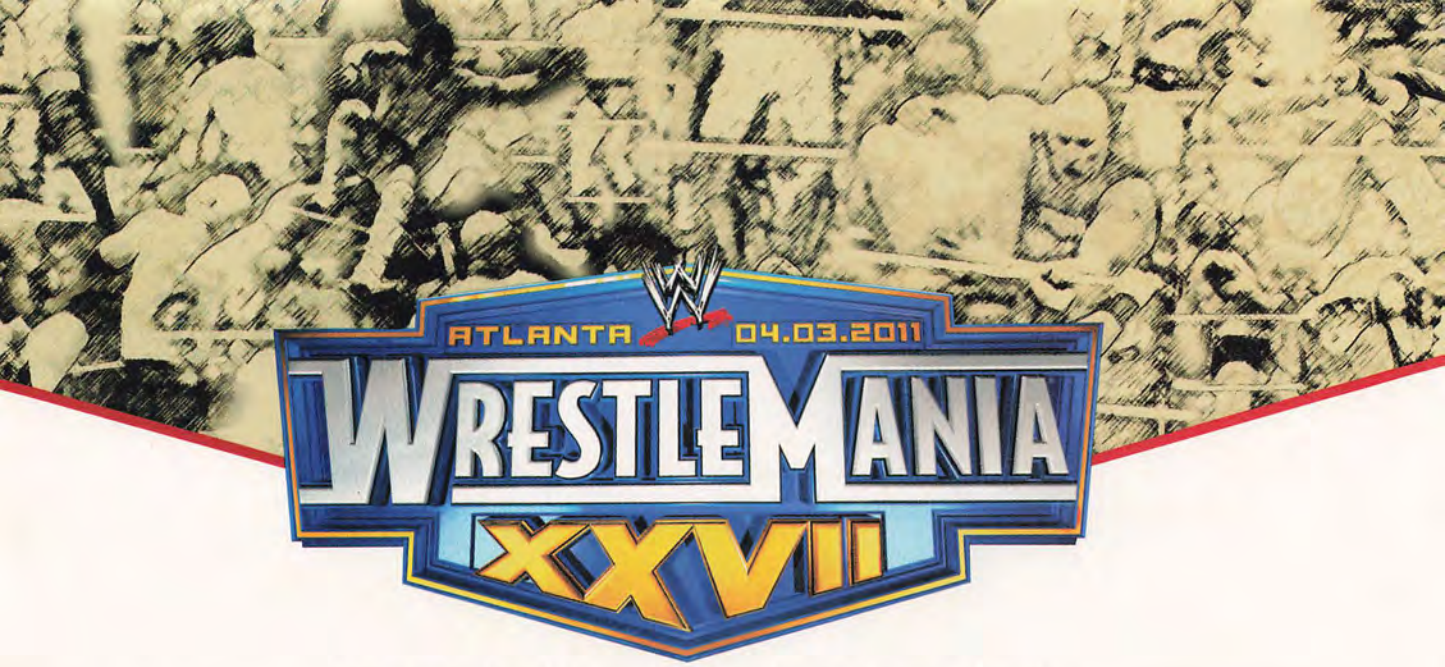
Team Lay-Cool's WM 27 Lowlight: The conclusion of this match saw McCool suffer the ultimate embarrassment imaginable. Not only was McCool pinned by the 4'9" Snooki, but she was outshined by her as well. Suddenly, McCool's multiple championship reigns didn't matter. All anyone was talking about the next day was Snooki's performance.

Near-Falls For Team Lay-Cool: 0

Total Time On Top: 0:18 (of 3:17)

Quote: "If McCool had let me start the match, like I wanted to, Team Lay-Cool would've put on a flawless performance at WrestleMania," Layla explained. "But no, Michelle always has to have her way."

Team Lay-Cool's Post-'Mania Direction: Much like his Team Snooki counterpart John Morrison, Dolph Ziggler emerges from WrestleMania 27 relatively unchanged by the mixed tag match. Ziggler understands full well that he was there only to support McCool and Layla, and to neutralize Morrison if necessary. Also, like Morrison, Ziggler is ready to resume his climb to the top of the Raw ladder. Oddly enough, it is Morrison who stands in his way. The future for Lay-Cool or Flawless is much less certain. Given the harsh words they exchanged and the shove McCool gave Layla at the beginning of the match (not to mention Layla's quote above), the tandem is at a crossroads. While Layla is underrated, she needs McCool more than the former Divas champ needs her, although McCool could use some high-profile victories to restore her image after being disgraced by a non-wrestler on the biggest card of the year. Layla is able to help in that regard, though she may no longer be willing.



THE MIZ

The Miz' WM 27 Highlight: According to some pre-match polls, more people expected The Rock to walk out of WrestleMania as WWE champion than expected Miz to successfully retain the title. Not only did Miz win the match (albeit it with a healthy assist from The Rock), but he also dominated most of the way. At the 3:31 mark, he ducked a wild Cena clothesline and countered with a variation of the Rock Bottom, which was both a clever poke at the 'Mania host and also an effective cut-off to change the momentum of the match.

The Miz' WM 27 Lowlight: Miz took a nasty fall outside the ring after being tackled through the guardrail by Cena, bouncing his head off the floor and suffering what was later diagnosed as a concussion. It was a painful injury that left Miz on Dream Street. Who knows if he was even coherent enough to enjoy his main-event victory?

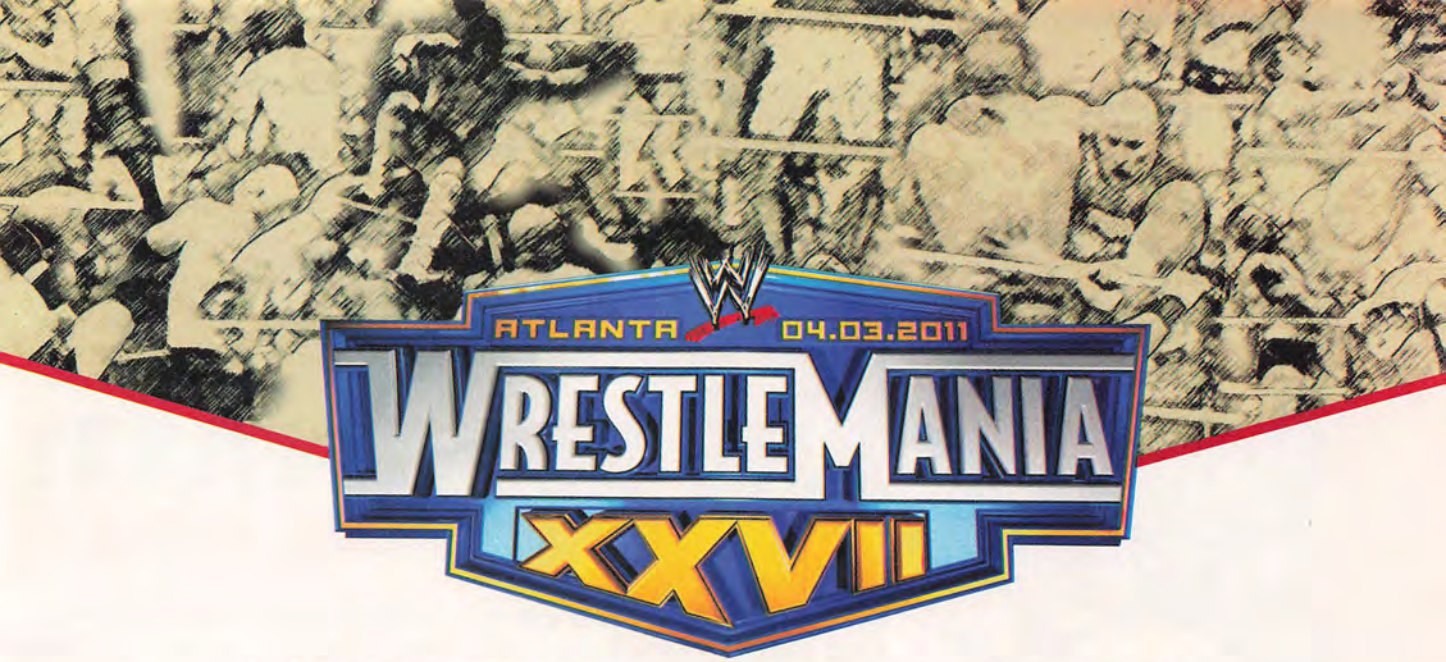
Near-Falls For Miz: 9

Total Time On Top: 8:22 (of 15:21)

Quote: "For weeks, everyone was talking about The Rock and John Cena. At WrestleMania, I reminded the world that there is only one WWE champion, and that man is The Miz—not a B-movie star or a rapping clown. I outshined Cena and upstaged The Rock, and proved once again that I am awesome!"

The Miz' Post-'Mania Direction: Now that Miz has survived 'Mania, it's starting to look like his reign might have legs. He has already beaten both Cena and Orton, and there aren't many obvious contenders on the horizon. Considering his improvement over the past year and the interference of Alex Riley, it is not impossible that Miz could hang on to his title for a long time to come.

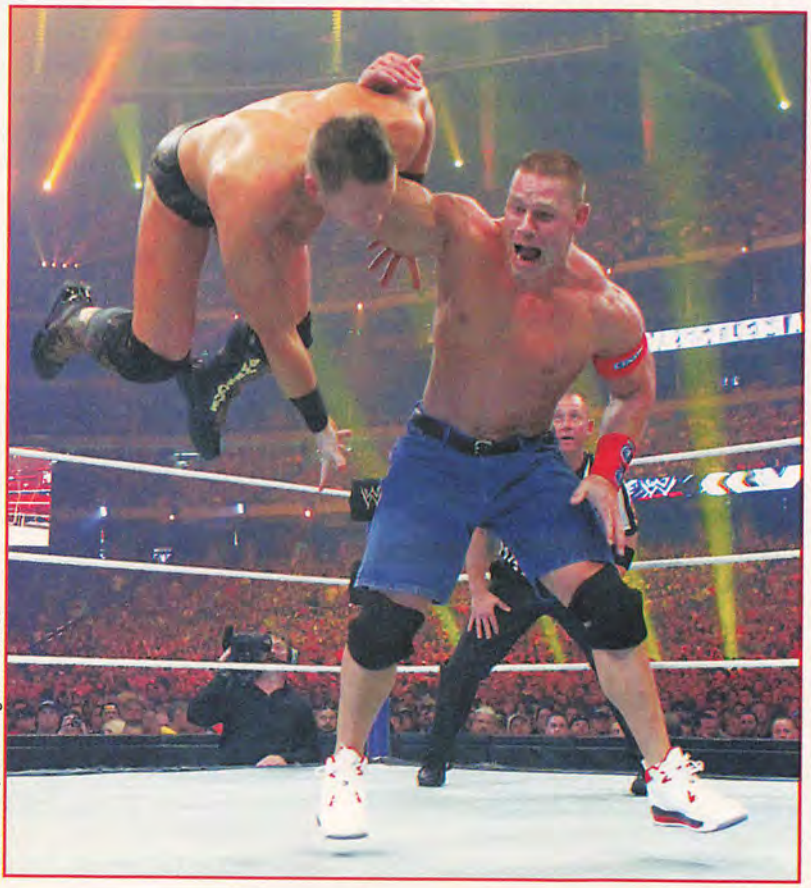
Photo by George Napolitano



JOHN CENA

Cena's WM 27 Highlight: The Miz tried to nail Cena with his steel briefcase, but Cena ducked, forcing Miz to smack cornerman Alex Riley in the face. Cena hoisted Miz over his shoulders, and, in a superhuman resurgence, popped the WWE champion toward the heavens in an incredible Attitude Adjustment. Even more amazingly, The Miz kicked out.

Cena's WM 27 Lowlight: Cena lost his temper and dived over the security guardrail with reckless abandon, knocking both men nearly unconscious and resulting in an initial double-count out. Not only was this an unwise strategy in a WWE title match, but Cena displayed a surprising lack of concern for how this WrestleMania could possibly end. A double-countout in the main event of WrestleMania? Really? We thought Cena was more of a company man than that.



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Near-Falls For Cena: 5

Total Time On Top: 4:03 (of 15:21)

Quote: "I thank The Rock for not allowing WrestleMania to end in a double-countout. But he cost me the WWE title on the biggest stage of them all. We're gonna settle up at WrestleMania 28."

Cena's Post-'Mania Direction: WWE's franchise player knows exactly what he'll be doing on April 1, 2012. He'll be at Sun Life Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida, across from the most electrifying man in all of entertainment. How does Cena keep the fans interested while keeping his rivalry with The Rock relevant yet firmly in the background? Cena will be feuding with The Corre in the coming months, but he should focus on beating Miz for the WWE title, further raising the stakes for his match at WM28.

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WWE HALL OF FAME

Photos: George Napolitano
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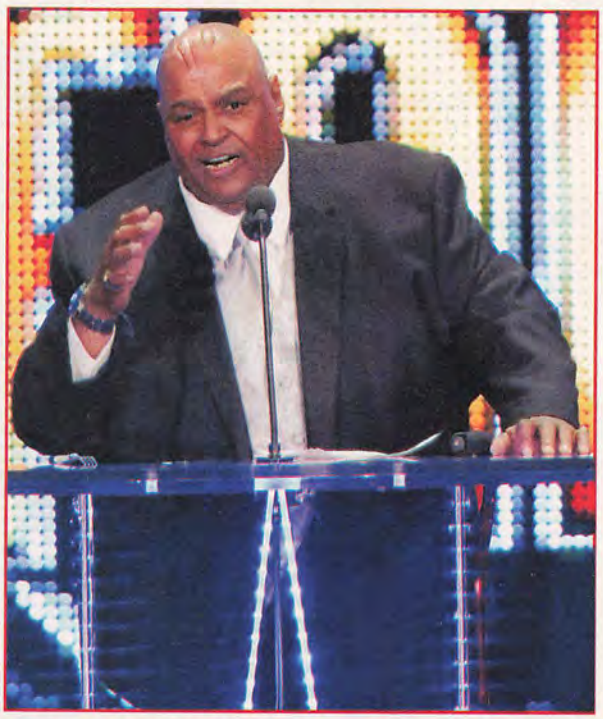
Hacksaw Duggan (right) was inducted into the 2011 Hall of Fame Class by the man whom he wrestled in hundred of matches, all over the world, Ted DiBiase (below). "To this point [the highlight of my career has] been the Andre the Giant main event in Madison Square Garden," Duggan said. "But to have something like this even tops Madison Square Garden."

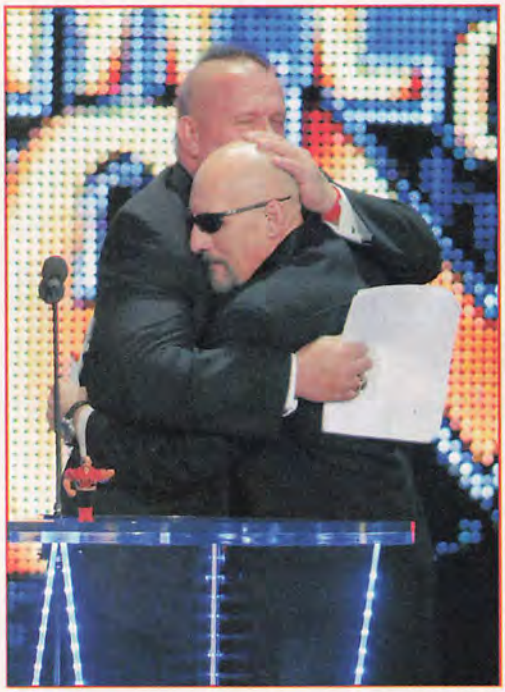
At 71 years old, Bob Armstrong (being walked to the podium by Kelly Kelly, left) still dons the tights on occasion. Many WWE fans are more familiar with "Bullet Bob's" sons, Scott, Brad, Brian, and Steve, three of whom were on hand in Atlanta to induct their dad (above). "It was really overwhelming," Bob said afterward. "I'm not used to that much attention. After 49 years, I thought I had done it all, seen it all, but I never had a feeling like tonight."

"To be inducted is amazing, to be the youngest inductee, to know that the WWE thinks that highly of me just blows my mind. I'm going to cry right now thinking about it," said 38-year-old Tammy "Sunny" Sytch (left) after being inducted by a collection of WWE Divas (above). "What an amazing group of girls," said Sytch. "Every time I come back ... they welcome me into the locker room like I'm home, like I never left."

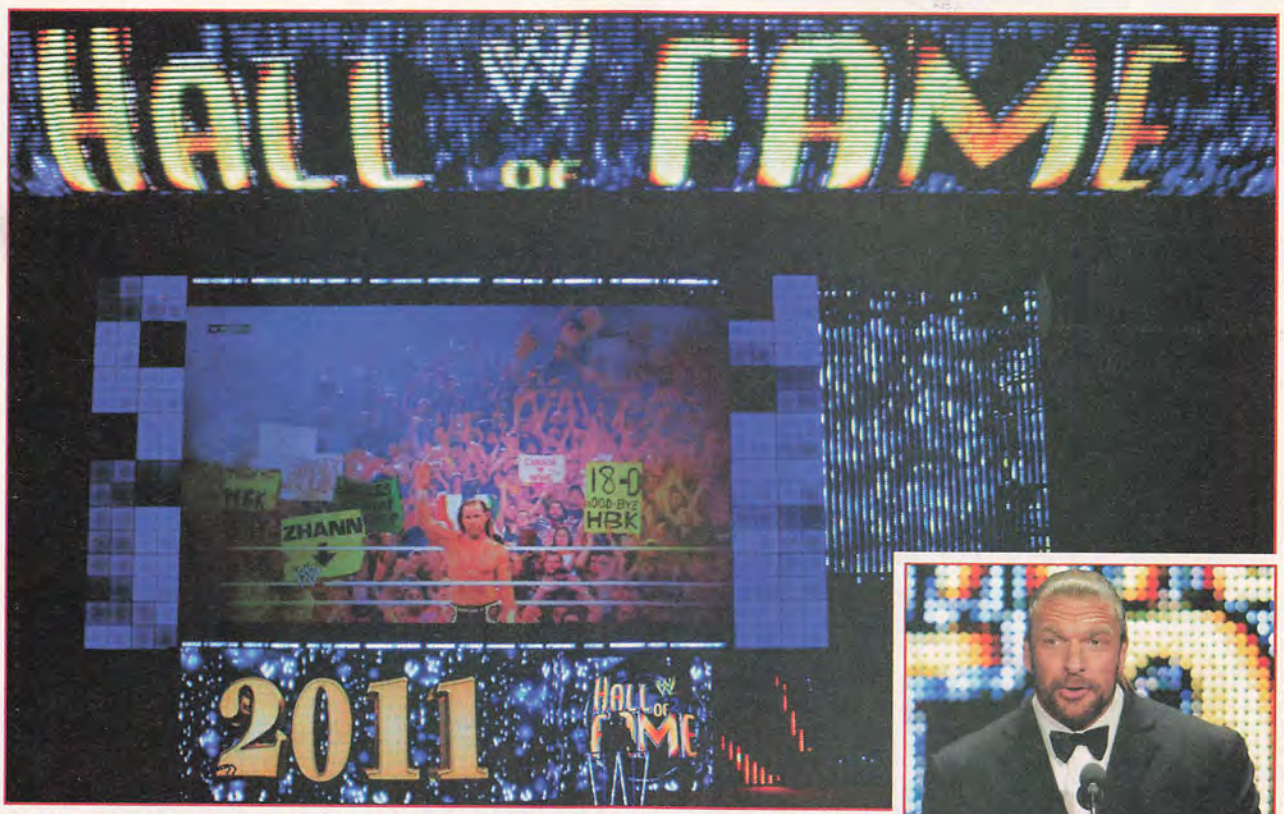


Abdullah the Butcher (above) has shocked a lot of people through the years, but it was he who was shocked when he received a call from WWE telling him that he would be in the Hall. "When they called me, I was sleeping and they told me they want to put me in the Hall of Fame," he said. "I jumped up and said, 'Just a minute.' I ran to the bathroom really fast, started putting water on my face, started smacking my face. I thought I was dreaming." Said Terry Funk (left), who introduced Butcher to the packed Philips Arena, "I made so much money with him, I would marry him if I could."

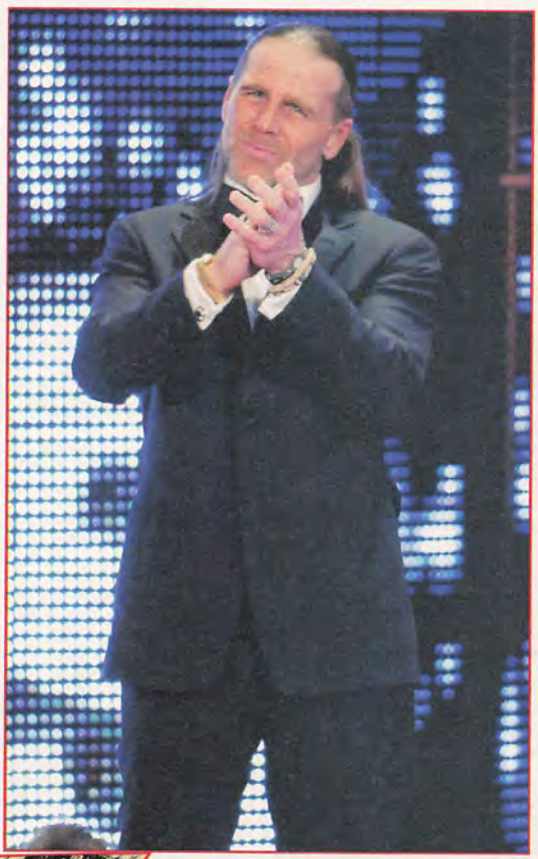
As WCW booker, Dusty Rhodes played a major part in the success of The Road Warriors. But even though he teamed the Hawk and Animal at times and proudly inducted them into the HOF in April (above left), it was Animal, Hawk, and manager Paul Ellering that were entirely responsible for making LOD the greatest tag team ever. Animal and Ellering pay tribute to their fallen partner in a very unique way (above right) and then share a tearful hug (below).



Drew Carey received a smattering of boos from the Atlanta crowd (or were they saying *"Drewww"?*). Few could understand how he even made it to the celebrity wing of the Hall. Carey was gracious nonetheless and recalled his experience in the 2001 Royal Rumble with the man who inducted him into the Hall a decade later (above). "When Kane lifted me up, it was a feat of strength. I remember thinking to myself, *You gotta be kidding me*—it was like my dad picking me up when I was six years old.



A video montage of Shawn Michaels' career included one of WrestleMania's most touching moments: HBK waving goodbye to the fans after being pinned into retirement by The Undertaker at WrestleMania 26 (above). Who else but his D-X partner and best friend Triple-H to induct this legendary performer (right)? Michaels is joined on stage by two more members of the so-called Kliq, Kevin Nash and Sean Waltman (below right). In the end, Shawn applauded the fans (below left) and said, "I have never won most popular; I wasn't the prom king; I wasn't the homecoming king; so I guess in my adult life the most important thing to me was that you all believed in me and thought I was good. And on this night at the 2011 Hall of Fame, I thank each and every one of you."



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Aug. 1981: Ted DiBiase: "Now I Know I Can Defeat Harley Race." Also: Mr. Wrestling II-Assassins, Dusty Rhodes, Sgt. Slaughter, Austin Idol, Blackwell-Gagne, Valentine-Bravo, Rick Martel, Bobby Eaton.

April 1982: How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Pedro Morales, Eric Embry, Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Roop-DiBiase, Armstrongs, John Studd.

July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

Aug. 1982: Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.

Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Putski & Snuka, Roddy Piper, Brian Blair, Chick Donovan, scaffold matches.

RODDY PIPER SUSPENDED!
Wrestler
Clash Of The Titans:
BACKLUND VS. FLAIR:
WHO'S BETTER?
Exclusive Analyses By The Champions Themselves
IVAN PUTSKI: "I HAVE NOTHING BUT RESPECT FOR SUPERFLY SNUKA"

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.

July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

Oct. 1983: Record-Breaking Seventh Title Reign: Harley Race Defeats Ric Flair For The NWA Title. Also: Ron Bass, Mr. Olympia-Mr. Wrestling II, Sawyer-Murdoch, Ann Gunkel, Briscos, Dillon-Mosca, Frank Tunney.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

July 1986: How King Kong Bundy Became The WWF's Most Hated Man. Also: Lex Luger, Nikita Koloff-Billy Graham, The Fabulous Ones, Ric Flair, Rick Martel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

May 1989: Rick Steamboat—Champion; Rick Steamboat—Challenger: Which Is Better? Also: Sid Vicious, Dusty Rhodes, Savage-Hogan, Samoan Swat Team, Wendi Richter.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

July 1989: Dino Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.

Dec. 1989: Gary Hart: "Muta Took The Sting Out Of Sting!" Also: Ken Patera, Larry Zbyszko, Skyscrapers, Andre & Ultimate Warrior, Barry Windham, Rock 'n' Roll Express.

Jan. 1990: The Hulk Hogan Book Of Lists. Also: Brian Pillman, Rich-Luger, Tully & Arn, P.Y. Chu-Hi, Greg Gagne.

April 1990: Hulk Hogan: A Decade Of Greatness. Also: Luger-Flair, Woman, Piper-Heenan, Billy Travis, Badd Company.

July 1990: My 10 Challenges To Ric Flair, By Lex Luger. Also: Lanny Poffo, Dusty-Savage, Luger-Flair, Doom, Tully Blanchard.

Sept. 1990: The Ultimate Warrior Wimps Out! Why He Won't Wrestle Hulk Hogan. Also: Billy Jack Haynes, Lex Luger, Doom-Steiners, Tugboat, Kerry-Borne.

Oct. 1990: Hulk Hogan vs. Earthquake: Exclusive SummerSlam Preview & Analysis. Also: Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Tommy Rich, Tasmanian Devil, Chris Von Erich.

Dec. 1990 (Special Issue): SummerSlam! Exclusive Full-Color Coverage! Also: Stan Hansen, Arn Anderson, Ultimate Warrior, Vic Steamboat, Scott Putski.

Feb. 1991: The Incredible "Halloween Havoc Hoax"! Unraveling The Diabolical Plot. Also: Muta-Steamboat, Hogan-Hart, Ultimate Warrior, Cornette & Express, Norman.

March 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: Roddy Piper Wants You! Also: Gilbert-Jarrett, Cornette & Express, Teddy Long, Survivor Series, Scott Norton.

April 1991: Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.

May 1991: Only Hulk Hogan Can Rid The WWF Of The Stench Of Sgt. Slaughter. Also: Ric Flair, Bobby Eaton, Sheik-Brazil, Power & Glory, Terry Funk.

June 1991: How Much Longer Can We Depend On Hulk Hogan? Also: Nasty Boys, Sting, Flair-Gigante, Cactus Jack, Kevin Von Erich.

July 1991: Can Ric Flair Shatter The "Myth" Of Japanese Superiority? Also: Embry & Prichard, LOD-Nastys, Steiners, Savage & Elizabeth.

Aug. 1991: If Sgt. Slaughter Said "I'm Sorry" ... Would Hulk And The World Forgive Him? Also: Luger-Nikita, Hennig-Davey Boy, Lanny Poffo, Bam Bam Bigelow.

Nov. 1991: Lex Luger Wins The Title—But Loses His Fans. Also: Rick Steamboat, Roddy Piper, Global, Diamond Studd, Lawler-Embry.

Jan. 1992: The LOD's Championship Catastrophe: Overpowered By The Natural Disasters. Also: Johnny B. Badd, Mr. Hughes, Jake Roberts, Ronnie Gossett.

Feb. 1992: Shocking WWF Report: McMahon Offers Bounty On Flair—Will Vince Pay The Piper? Also: Ron Simmons, Tito Santana, Bob Backlund, R. Steiner-Abdullah.

March 1992: After Survivor Series & Tuesday In Texas: Has The WWF Title Suffered Irreparable Damage? Also: Brian Pillman, Anderson & Bruiser, Rude-Sting, Mountie-Hart, Jeff Jarrett.

April 1992: After A Year Of Tragedy & Turmoil: The Magic Is Back In WCW! Also: Chris Candido, Paul Orndorff, Lady X, Paul Bearer, Hennig & Flair, Michaels & Jannetty.

July 1992: "Number Two Just Won't Do" For Rick Rude, The U.S. Belt Means Failure. Also: Greg Valentine, Madusa, Gorilla Monsoon, Legion of Doom, Nurse Vanessa.

Aug. 1992: The Ultimate Warrior: WrestleMania's Accidental Hero. Also: Bunkhouse matches, Undertaker-Roberts, Sting, JYD, Rob Van Dam.

Sept. 1992: Hey, Legion Of Doom—Go For The Title Or Go Away! Also: Repo-Crush, Mondo Kleen, Freebirds-Valentine & Taylor, Dangerous Alliance, Moondogs.

Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.

Nov. 1992: WWF Beware! It's The Perfect Time For A Curt Hennig Comeback! Also: Crush, Butch Reed, Sting, Buddy Rogers, Dan Spivey.

Dec. 1992: He's *Baaaaaack!* Jake Roberts Slithers Into WCW. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan, Michaels-Martel, Gilberts-Rock 'n' Rolls.

Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

Feb. 1993: WWF Champion Bret Hart: His Five Most Dangerous Challenges. Also: Sgt. Slaughter, Steve Austin, Rick Steiner, Bob Backlund, Terry Taylor.

March 1993 (Special Issue): 1992—The Year In Pictures. Also: Madusa-Paul E., Curt Hennig, Davey Boy Smith, Jesse Ventura, Predictions For '93.

April 1993 What's In? What's Out? Also: Razor Ramon, Rick Steamboat, Patriot, Tatanka, Brian Christopher.

May 1993: Sumo Sadism: Will Yokozuna Make His Biggest Splash At WrestleMania? Also: Jim Cornette, Christopher-Jarrett, Benoit-Scorpio, Windham & Rhodes, Hennig-Luger.

Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.

May 1994: Aftershocks! How The Royal Rumble Shook Up WrestleMania. Also: Hulk Hogan, Boss, Douglas-Sherri, Patriot, improve WCW.

July 1994: Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan: We Preview The Inevitable Battle. Also: Dreamer-Snuka, Jim Crockett's WWN, Ted DiBiase, Shane Douglas, Terra Ryzing.

Aug. 1994: Bret's Nightmare Team Becomes A Reality: Owen Hart & Yokozuna. Also: Cactus-Vader, MOM, Flair-Badd, Nasty Boys, Luna Vachon.

Sept. 1994 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report! Also: Big Van Vader, Parker-Hollywood Blonds, Sting-Rude, WWF legal problems, Prince Kharis, Bunkhouse-Rhodes, Public Enemy.

Nov. 1994: Hulk Hogan's New Commandments: Say Prayers, Take Vitamins ... And Kick Butt! Also: Owen-Bret, Lord Steven Regal, Johnny B. Badd, Jerry Lawler, Mikey Whipwreck.

BRET OR OWEN: WHICH HART BEATS STRONGER?
THE WRESTLER
Wrestler
HULK HOGAN'S NEW COMMANDMENTS:
SAY PRAYERS ... TAKE VITAMINS ... AND KICK BUTT!

Jan. 1995: Our Holiday Wish List For 1995. Also: Johnny B. Badd, DiBiase-Tatanka, Bob Backlund, PG-13, Hacksaw Duggan.

Feb. 1995: Hulk's A Maniac! Why Vader Should Be Deathly Afraid Of Hogan. Also: Honky Tonk Man, Sabu-Dangerously, Skaaland-Luger, Steiners, Patriot-Bagwell, Undertaker-Vicious.

April 1995: Imagine Wrestling Today If ... Also: Gunn & Smothers, Harlem Heat, Money Inc., Lawler-Cornette.

June 1995 (Special Issue): He's Barking ... And He's Ready To Bite: The British Bulldog Demands A Title Shot—Now! Also: Avalanche, Bubba Rogers, The Kid, Alex Wright, Rottens.

July 1995: Hulk Hogan's Contract With America. Also: Marty Jannetty, Brian Pillman, Lawrence Taylor, Bill Dundee.

Oct. 1995: President Backlund?! Also: Steiners, Austin & Pillman, Miss Texas, Gordon Solie.

Nov. 1995: "Take That—And Shut Up!" If Savage Can't Silence Flair, He's Through! Also: Mabel, Jarrett-Ramon, Renegade, WWF legends roundtable.

Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Arn Anderson.

Nov. 1996: Brian Pillman: Next WWF Champ! Also: Giant-Sting, Ray Stevens, Dick Murdoch, Cloudy, John Tenta, WCW shuffle.

Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW! Also: Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bulldog, Ted DiBiase.

Feb. 1997: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1997 Has In Store For Them! Also: Michaels-Hart, Pit Bull I, Rey Mysterio Jr., Kevin Nash.

May 1997: Hogan's Headache: The Pain Is Piper! And The Remedy Is Revenge! Also: Michaels-Hart, Guerreros, J.C. Ice, gang violence, Marc Mero.

Nov. 1997: 10-Year Grudge! Lex Luger's Career Ruined By J.J. Dillon? Also: Shawn-Bret, Jeff Jarrett, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn.

Hol. 1997: First Owen ... Then 'Taker ... Then Hogan: Who's Gonna Go Next? Also: Steve Austin, Bret Hart, Lex Luger, Ric Flair, Dean Malenko.

March 1998 (Special Issue): 1997—The Year In Pictures. Also: The Road Warriors, Rey Mysterio Jr., Undertaker, The Giant.

April 1998: "We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success? Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

June 1998: Hollywood Hogan: 10 More Dirty Deeds ... And Then He's Outta Here! Also: DeGeneration X, Jim Cornette, Randy Savage, yesterday and today.

July 1998: Death Wish! Costing Hogan The Title Isn't Enough For The Macho Man: What's Next? Also: Ric Flair, Headbangers-Rock 'n' Rolls, Chris Chetti, Mero & Sable.

Aug. 1998: We Stand Behind Ya, Vince! It's Time To Fire Austin. Also: Luna-Sable, Randy Savage, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney.

Sept. 1998 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: Nash-Hogan, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg, Antonio Inoki.

Oct. 1998: The Mother Of All Pay-Per-Views! A WWF-WCW Supercard Is No Longer Just Talk! Also: Sable, Undertaker, Randy Savage, Sabu & Van Dam.

Nov. 1998: Demons Be Damned! Sting Makes The Giant See Red! Also: McMahon-Dude, Jarrett-Blackman, Melanie Pillman, Rey Mysterio Jr.

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Jan. 1999: Stone-Cold's Personal Survivor Series. Also: Rock-HHH, NWA, Bret Hart, Howard Finkel, three-way title matches.

Feb. 1999: Hot Rocks! The Anger That Drives Shamrock & The Rock. Also: McMahon-Austin, Spike Dudley, Eric Bischoff, Perry Saturn.

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May 1999: Team Coverage: The NWO Reunion! Also: Kane-McMahon, Dallas Page, Funk-Abdullah, WWF sideshow.

June 1999 (Special Issue): Ric Flair: The 10 Feats He Must Accomplish Before He's Through. Also: Rocky Maivia, Juventud Guerrera, Billy Gunn, body parts quiz section.

July 1999: Our Bottom Line ... It's High Time Austin Shows McMahon Respect! Also: Jerry Lawler, Rey Mysterio Jr., Ken Shamrock, DDP-Bigelow-Goldberg.

Aug. 1999: This Man Is Pure Evil! Trust Hogan And He'll Take You To Hell! Plus: Owen Hart, Vader, Sable.

Sept. 1999 (Special Issue): WWF Midyear Report. Also: DDP-Sting, Douglas-Credible, Big Show-McMahons, Disco Inferno, Keirn & Lane.

Oct. 1999: Shawn Michaels' Game Of Corporate Chess! Are The McMahons His Pawns? Also: Steiners, Billy Gunn, Savage & George.

Nov. 1999: Austin's New Powers: Shag Vince? Yeah, Baby! Also: Arn-Sid, Hardy Boys, Ernest Miller, Naoya Ogawa.

Hol. 1999: Before The WWF Can Sell ... Read What They Had To Tell! Also: Kanyon, Big Show, Spike & Mahoney-Axl & New Jack, Kevin Nash.

Feb. 2000: When Will Mankind Finally Tell The Rock ... "Put A Sock In It"? Also: Goldberg, Chris Jericho, Sabu, Harlem Heat.

March 2000 (Special Issue): 1999—The Year In Pictures. Also: Triple-H, Luger-Liz, Sabu-Van Dam, Bob Holly.

April 2000: Can The WWF Survive Without Steve Austin? Also: Dawn Marie-Francine, Meng, Big Show, Madusa.

May 2000: StePHONY: The Most Mistrusted McMahon Of All! Also: Harlem Heat & Midnight, David & Ric Flair, Kurt Angle, Rhino.

June 2000 (Special Issue): The Rock: No. 1 On The Jabroni Hit List! Also: Awesome-Van Dam, Kurt Angle, Vampiro, federation jumpers, book of lists.

July 2000: Tori/Torrie, What's The Story? How They Rank In 10 Crucial Categories. Also: Big Show, Tank Abbott, Too Cool, Rhodes-Dreamer, Jeff Jarrett.

Aug. 2000: We're Con-Vinced! This Attack Saved The WWF! Also: Lex Luger, Radicals, Sandman & Rhino, Cyrus.

Sept. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF Mid-Year Report. Also: Mike Awesome, Nova & Chetti, Paul Wight, Chyna, Dr. Sam Sheppard.

Oct. 2000: Is Chyna Robbing Eddie Of His Latino Heat? Also: Abbott-Steiner, Scotty Too Hotty, Rob Van Dam, David Flair.

Nov. 2000: Special Fear Issue—Rock-Benoit, Ric Flair, HBK. Also: ECW mid-year report, Bill Goldberg.

Dec. 2000 (Special Issue): WWF vs. WCW: Top 10 Faceoff! Also: Goldberg-Triple-H, Daffney, Christian & Edge, Jeff Peterson.

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Jan. 2001: WWF Brat-titude! Does Steph Always Get Her Way? Not On Your Life! Also: Lance Storm, Mick Foley, Goldberg, Steve Corino, Steve Blackman, Torrie Wilson.

March 2001: Triple-H & The Rock: 10 Reasons They Should Trust Each Other ... 10 Reasons They Should Not! Also: Scott Steiner, Chris Candido, Rob Van Dam, McMahon-ECW, Steven Richards, WCW factions.

May 2001: Do Anything You Want, Stone-Cold: We Can't Hate You. Also: Kronic, Rikishi, Steve Corino, Goldberg, Edge & Christian, Kane.

July 2001: Jerichoholics Beware! Serious Withdrawal Symptoms Are In Store! Also: Tajiri, Steph-Test, Undertaker, Mike Awesome, WCW Elite, Albert.

Sept. 2001: The Rock's Choice: Honor Over Glory! Also: WrestleMania X-Seven, Undertaker-Triple-H, Shane-WCW, TCL II, Scott Hall, Vince McMahon, Chris Jericho.

Nov. 2001: Goldberg! Da Man Who Could Make Or Break Wrestling! Also: Dudleys, Steve Corino, Chris Benoit, Dusty Rhodes, Lita, WWF top tier.

Jan. 2002: Can The Rock Handle The Unrelenting Pressure Of Fame? Also: RVD, Paul Heyman, Terry Gordy, Flash-Jericho, Tajiri-Tazz, WWF-Alliance

March 2002: Outsiders Looking In! Hall & Nash Take Aim At The WWF! Also: Ivory, Austin-Angle, Christian-Edge, what's ahead in '02.

May 2002: Ric Flair: 10 Reasons He Terrifies Vince McMahon. Also: Undertaker, Jeff Hardy, Survivor Series, S.A.T., report cards.

July 2002: Hail The NWO ... But Don't Forget The N-W-Woes! Also: Edge, Billy & Chuck, Leviathon, Jericho-Flair, Goldust.

Sept. 2002: What's Left? Hulk Hogan's Five Remaining Tasks. Also: Steve Austin, Kurt Angle, Rey Mysterio Jr., Jeff Peterson, WWF draft.

Nov. 2002: Who's Next? The Stars That Could Replace Stone-Cold. Also: Torrie Wilson, Davey Boy Smith, Ken Shamrock, Funk-Abdullah-Rhodes-Sullivan, WWE shockers, indy roulette.

Jan. 2003: War Games! WWE Is Out Of Control ... And Vinnie Mac Loves It! Also: Rey Mysterio Jr., AJ Styles, Rikishi-Gangrel, The Rock, Christian.

March 2003: The WrestleMania XIX We Want To See! Also: Terry Funk, Rey Mysterio Jr., Nidia, NWA-TNA, what's ahead in '03.

May 2003: A Permanent Replacement For The Rock? Book It! Also: Smackdown, Joanie & Syxx-Pac, Raw report cards, Shawn Michaels, Victoria.

July 2003: In Tune With Steve Austin—A Comprehensive Guide To Stone-Cold's Red-Hot Comeback. Also: Kurt Angle, Amazing Red, The Sheik, Bill DeMott, Al Snow, Ric Flair.

Nov. 2003: The Women Of Wrestling—Do We Expect Too Much From Their Bodies? Also: AJ Styles, Freddie Blassie, Goldberg, Stacy Keibler, evolution of wrestling.

Jan. 2004: No Fear! Ask Angle ... He's Never Been Hurt A Day In His Life! Also: Punk-Raven, Orton-Guerrero-Rock, TNA vs. WWE, Mankind, Hall of Fame.

March 2004: McMahon vs. McWoman: How Vince vs. Stephanie Nearly Ruined WWE! Also: Flair & Dusty, Eric Angle, Jeff Jarrett, Shannon Moore, what's ahead in '04.

July 2004: Stop Right There! RVD Won't Let The Young Studs Pass Him By! Also: Jonny Fairplay, Walters-Xavier, HHH-HBK.

Oct. 2004: Austin, Lesnar, Goldberg: We Know Who'll Be Back First. Also: AJ. Styles, Eugene, Rene Dupree, mid-year report.

Jan. 2005: Evolving Beyond Evolution: It's Time For Randy Orton To Be A Man! Also: Rey Mysterio Jr., Kane-Lita, Ron Killings, La Resistance, Eugene-Helmsley, Trish-Victoria, Kurt Angle, WWE mid-carders.

April 2005: PPV Revolution: How Taboo Tuesday & Victory Road Changed Wrestling Forever. Also: Eddie Guerrero, Jushin Liger, Edge-Benoit, Kane-Snitsky, TNA vs. ROH, Heyman & Heidenreich, Charlie Haas, WWE pink slips.

June 2005: Chokehold On America: Have Hassan & Daivari Put Us In A No-Win Situation? Also: Sabu, Edge, Shelton Benjamin, ECW, report cards.

Oct. 2005: Big Fish Trish: Will She Drown In Her Little Pond? Also: Guerrero & Mysterio, Matt Hardy, Batista, mid-year report.

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7786/04-11

Photo by Stu Saks

Special Analysis:

DOES THE START OF SIN CARA'S WWE CAREER MEAN THE END OF REY MYSTERIO'S?

TEXT BY **HARRY BURKETT**

HE'S 10 YEARS younger. He's 10 years stronger. He's 10 years faster. That's how Sin Cara is being compared to Rey Mysterio Jr. as the international phenomenon finally makes his grand entrance into WWE.

We've seen this before in pro wrestling: The rising star finally meets his idol in the ring. Ric Flair faced Buddy Rogers in a battle of the "Nature Boys" in 1979. Buddy Landel faced Flair in a case of history repeating itself in 1985 (except Landel added that he was "10 years better-looking"). Chris Benoit faced Bret Hart. And who could forget Larry Zbyszko clashing with Bruno Sammartino?

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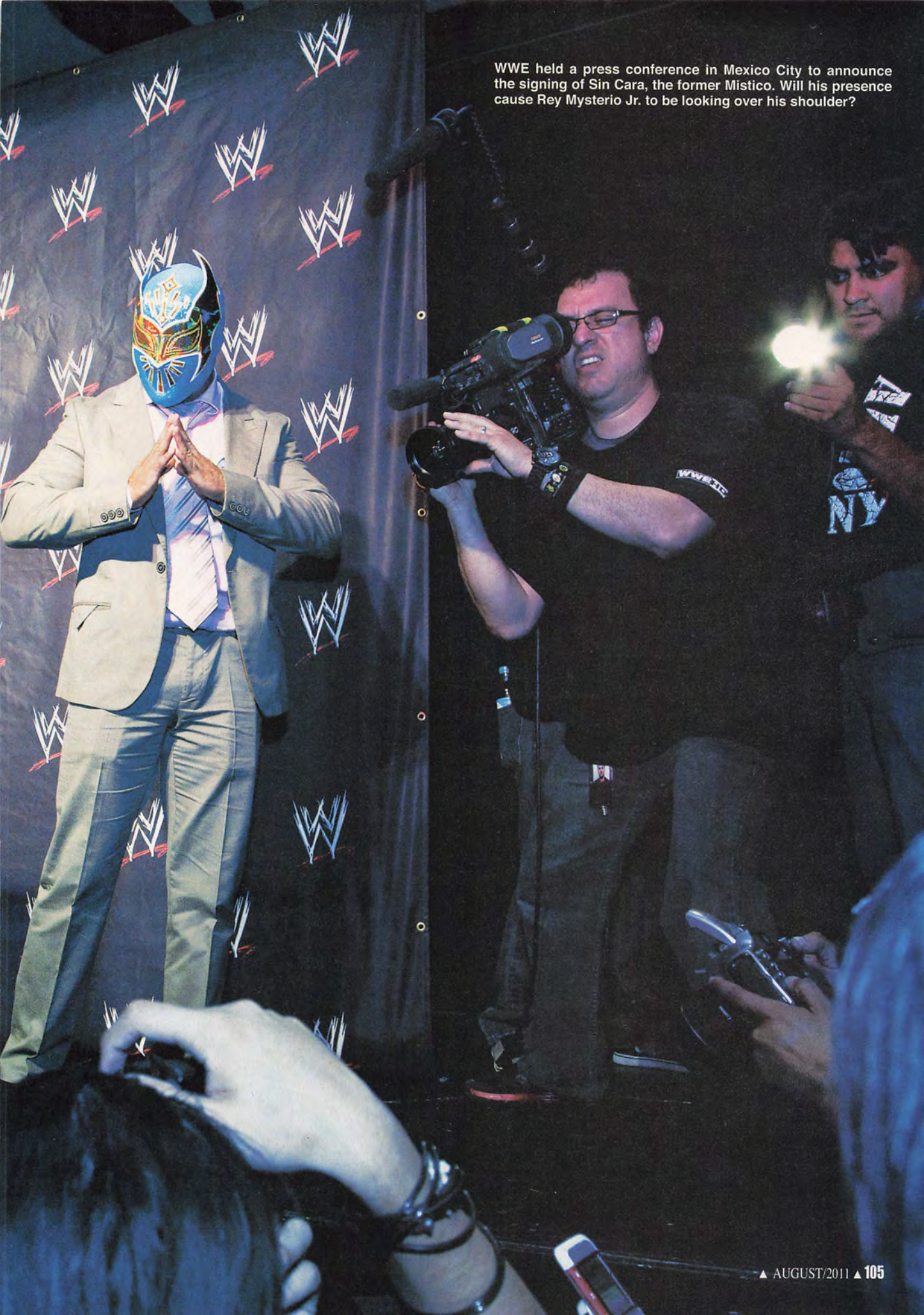

WWE held a press conference in Mexico City to announce the signing of Sin Cara, the former Mistico. Will his presence cause Rey Mysterio Jr. to be looking over his shoulder?

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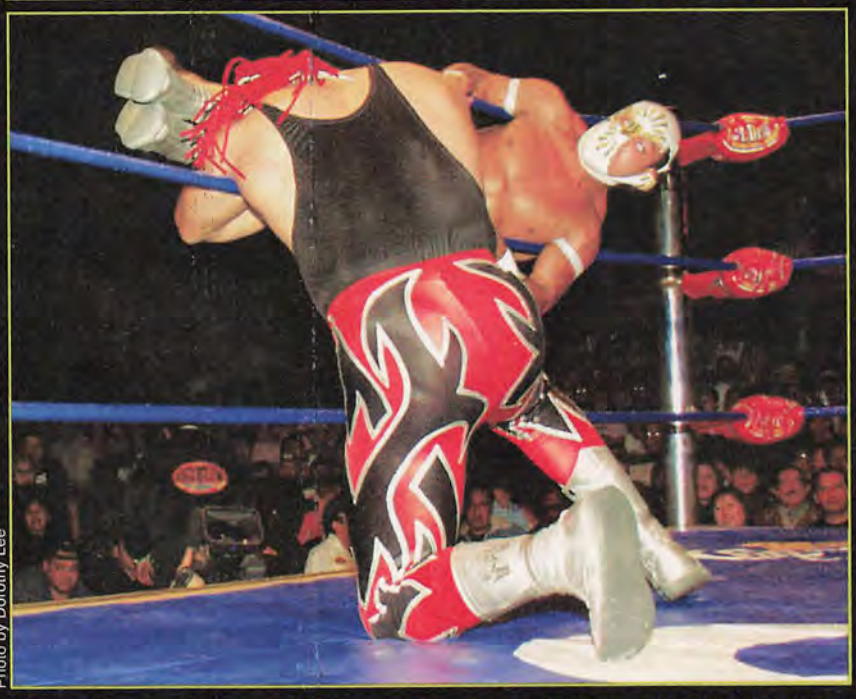

Photo by Dorothy Lee

We don't know what Cara's U.S. area code will be, but we hope it's not 6-1-9. If Rey does indeed show the 28-year-old the WWE ropes, it's a good bet that he'll show him a different way to use them.

But this situation is different. Cara isn't targeting Mysterio. Likewise, Mysterio doesn't resent Sin Cara's arrival. When WWE held its much-anticipated press conference on February 24 in Mexico City to announce the signing of Mistico, who would be repackaged as "Sin Cara" (meaning "without face"), there was no hint that a Cara-Mysterio showdown was in the works.

Yet the cynics pressed their case. Why would Mysterio want Cara on his turf? On an international scale, it could be argued that Cara had already become a bigger star than Mysterio. After all, Mistico shocked the world when he placed number five in the "*PWI* 500" in 2006, exactly one spot higher than Mysterio, who had captured the World heavyweight title that year. Some perceived that ranking as an insult to Mysterio, who had enjoyed perhaps the greatest run of his career.

Formerly known as the second incarnation of Astro Boy, Mistico—clad in a silver outfit with gold highlights—exploded on the scene on June 18, 2004. Within two months, he had teamed with Mexico's biggest star, El Hijo del Santo, to defeat Ultimo Guerrero and Mr. X in the final round of the prestigious Gran Alternativa tournament.

His feuds with Ultimo Guerrero and Black Warrior raged throughout Mexico in 2004 and 2005, and Mistico became to Arena Mexico what Bruno Sammartino had become to Madison Square Garden. He became its centerpiece and focal point, as vital to its structure as the mortar that held it together. After achieving number five in the 2006 "*PWI* 500," Mistico won more major tournaments, racked up more titles, and won four mask-vs.-mask matches while maintaining the busiest schedule in wrestling, 10 matches per week.

Mistico earned the number-three spot in the 2007 "*PWI* 500," right behind John Cena and Edge. Only a shoulder injury slowed his momentum and might have cost him the number-one spot. Mysterio was on the disabled list that year and didn't place at all.

Please forgive us if it sounds like we're trying to cook up a rivalry here. Mysterio's friends insist that it was the former World champion himself who lobbied WWE to sign Sin Cara and that he views his fellow masked man as an asset to the roster. He will no doubt adopt Cara as a protégé, at least behind the scenes. Plus, Mysterio has already seen WWE allow the cruiserweight division to disintegrate into nothing. He feels that Cara is vital to re-establishing a lucha libre influence in WWE, if not resurrecting the cruiserweight division in another form.

And Cara fits into WWE's plans perfectly. Just as WWE signed Bret Hart, The British Bulldogs, and Dino Bravo to bolster its standing in Canada during the 1980s, the company now acknowledges that it has ignored Mexico for too long. Alberto Del Rio, who competed in Mexico as Dos Caras for

almost a decade before making his WWE debut, is another key figure in the company's plan to further establish itself south of the border. Mysterio, a Mexican-American who is more familiar on Mexican television screens than in Mexican hometowns, will be around for as long as he wants—or as long as his body permits.

All of our sources inside WWE insist that Sin Cara is not viewed as a replacement for Mysterio. True, Mysterio's ankles, knees, and back are aching after two decades in the ring. But Cara hasn't exactly been working a desk job for the past 12 years and is working through nagging injuries of his own. He will need Mysterio as a credible tag team partner or eventual rival. It's still uncertain whether Cara will ultimately end up on Raw or Smackdown, or whether Mysterio will stay put on the blue brand.

Furthermore, it seems that the addition of Cara will not be the end of WWE's efforts to sign and develop more high-flyers. There's been recent recognition that Raw and Smackdown events have lacked fast-paced, high-risk action as of late, but Cara should take care of that shortcoming.

And how does Sin Cara feel about sharing the spotlight with Mysterio? By all reports, he is among the legions in Mexico who mention Mysterio in the same breath as El Santo, Blue Demon, and Mil Mascaras. He has nothing but the utmost respect for Mysterio and his accomplishments.

Then again, Cara is ambitious. His meteoric rise is proof of that. And there are a couple of causes for concern. While Cara remains Mexico's top star and a well-paid special attraction in Japan, his red-hot momentum has cooled, as he dropped to number 42 in last year's "*PWI* 500" while Mysterio remained at a respectable number 13. He has also shown signs of turning *rudo* during the past year, assaulting Volador Jr. on many occasions and even refusing to hand over the Mexican light heavyweight title after Volador had beaten him for it. Yet Cara maintains that he broke the rules only against Volador, and even wore a specially designed mask for those occasions.

Cara is probably the biggest star ever to sign with WWE who most of the fans don't even know. Readers of this magazine, however, are familiar with the man who twice finished among the top five in the "*PWI* 500."

Doesn't this seem like someone who would turn against Mysterio under the right circumstances?

The conventional wisdom, however, is that WWE won't let that happen. There's even talk that Creative may keep them separated for a while. But it's hard to imagine that WWE won't orchestrate this dream match at some point. Historians still talk about El Santo vs. Black Shadow in 1952. The only bout that could possibly surpass that is Sin Cara vs. Rey Mysterio Jr. in 2011.

So, no, don't think that WWE is about to wish Mysterio "the best in his future endeavors." If anything, WWE will want to exploit the star-power and talents of both Sin Cara and Mysterio for years to come. □

Photo by George Napolitano

Mysterio is a savvy businessman. He knows that even an untrustworthy man like Alberto Del Rio will help WWE establish its presence in Mexico. With the names Mysterio, Del Rio, and Sin Cara on the bill, WWE (and those three in particular) will see some big paydays.

THE BUSINESS PAGE

BY HARRY BURKETT

Attention all shoppers ... The Jaclyn Smith Collection wasn't available at Walmart. The Kathie Lee Collection wasn't available at Kmart. Few brands are powerful enough to strike exclusive deals with one retail giant, let alone two.

But WWE has done just that. WWE has pulled off a retail coup, striking exclusive deals with Walmart, the world's largest retailer, and Kmart, the world's third-largest retail chain, within the span of one month.

First came the announcement that Kmart would become the exclusive presenting sponsor of all of WWE's live events throughout 2011. Being linked with WrestleMania 27 was a big deal for Kmart, which has struggled since filing for bankruptcy in 2002 and merging with Sears Holdings Corporation in 2005. The agreement also grants Kmart 30-second spots on *Raw* and *Smackdown* programs, and a cross-promotional microsite at wwe.com. WWE talent will also make personal appearances at Kmart stores. This campaign is considered important in Kmart's efforts to reach a younger, hipper demographic.

Then it was revealed that WWE and its distribution partner, Vivendi Entertainment, had reached an agreement with Walmart, making it the official retailer for WWE Studios' next five theatrical releases, running through 2012. That means only Walmart will be able to sell WWE movie DVDs for the first 90 days of their release. Triple-H's comedy, *The Chaperone*, was the first movie affected by the new deal. Walmart also had exclusive retail rights to John Cena's *Legendary*, and the success of that venture led to the long-term agreement with WWE.

In related news, *McMahon*, the two-disc DVD featuring the matches of the WWE chairman, just made the Walmart bargain bin!

Photo by Michael Becker/FOX

Hulk Hogan makes a surprise appearance on *American Idol* to let contestants Paul McDonald (left) and James Durbin know that they will not be tossed from the show that week. McDonald and Durbin are huge wrestling fans.

Brooke's still waiting for her invite ... Nothing was wrong with your TV set, brother. That was Hulk Hogan on *American Idol*. He didn't try to sing "Real American" or break out the bass guitar, though. He was there to meet James Durbin and Paul McDonald, *Idol* hopefuls who happen to be wrestling fans. In fact, their frequent "matches" against each other behind the scenes was the subject of a video package that aired on *Idol*.

So when it came time for Ryan Seacrest to announce whether Durbin and McDonald were "safe" or destined for the "bottom three" during an *Idol* results show, "Eye Of The Tiger" suddenly blasted throughout the studio, the curtains parted, and there was Hogan posing for the adoring audience. It seemed like a flashback to 1984 as Randy Jackson and Jennifer Lopez, in particular, began marking out for the world to see.

Hogan announced that his "brothers," Durbin and McDonald, were safe. But then he announced that Seacrest was not safe, giving him a soft right-hand, which Seacrest sold better than Roddy Piper ever did.

After the show, Durbin posted the following message on his Twitter account, appropriately named @HulkHogan4Real: "Thank you so much for that immortal moment. I've already taken those words to heart. I await the future, brother!"

Unfortunately for Dixie Carter, TNA was not mentioned during the segment, although Durbin did a terrific impersonation of The Miz and received a WWE title belt on television the following week. Hey, Hulk, you could've at least worn a TNA T-shirt!

WWE scores in Canada ... It was no surprise when WWE renewed its contract with The Score to continue airing its programming on Canada's most prominent sports network, which is available in 6.8 million homes. Yet, it is a sign of the times that the contract underwent an overhaul to include online, mobile, and video-on-demand rights. WWE and Score executives believe this multiplatform approach will give the WWE Universe a more comprehensive fan experience.

Canadians are the lucky ones. They're able to find a significant amount of WWE programming on one cable channel. *Raw* airs on Mondays at 9:15 p.m. Eastern (there is a 15-minute tape delay), repeats at midnight, and airs again on Tuesday afternoons. *Smackdown* airs on Fridays. And three bonuses are *WWE NXT* (which is available only on wwe.com in the U.S.), *WWE Experience* (a Raw-Smackdown highlight show), and *WWE Vintage Collection*, which airs on Saturday evenings.

If only we could get so many shows on USA!

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Fittingly, Chris Masters wrestled Tyler Reks on the very last episode of *Superstars* on WGN America. WWE rarely committed its best talent to the show, and that was reflected in the poor Nielsen ratings.

WWE STOCKWATCH

[For the period of February 1 to March 31, 2011]

60-Day High: 14.10 on March 10
60-Day Low: 11.86 on February 1
52-Week High: 18.95 on April 26, 2010
52-Week Low: 12.86 on May 6, 2010

In 2002, WWE got the "F" out. In 2011, WWE has gotten rid of "wrestling." Yes, after a 30-year quest to rid the wrestling world of, well, wrestling, Vince McMahon has re-branded his company so it will be known solely as "WWE," not as "World Wrestling Entertainment." In the literal sense, WWE now stands for nothing. According to McMahon's corporate worldview, WWE now stands for everything.

"The new business model of the company better reflects what WWE is all about, being a global entertainment company," stated WWE's chairman and CEO. "We will always be loyal to our core business that made WWE a globally known entity. However, the future of WWE will be the addition of new entertainment content opportunities beyond the ring."

WWE will be launching national consumer and business-to-business campaigns to reflect this change with the tagline, "Bigger. Badder. Better."

Some investors will no doubt like this change, considering they will feel as if WWE is going beyond the fishy "rasslin' business" and transforming into a sleek, corporate shark. WWE has already experienced success with WWE Studios, and with a television network in the works, McMahon must have figured the time to really de-emphasize wrestling is now.

The post-WrestleMania period has always been a time when McMahon prefers to make major changes. And why not? With WrestleMania 27 grossing $6.6-million from the live attendance at the Georgia Dome alone, few people will question his business acumen.

TV BREAKDOWN

RAW [USA]

February 7: 3.3
February 14: 3.1
February 21: 3.9
February 28: 3.8
March 7: 3.9
March 14: 3.7
March 21: 3.4
March 28: 3.8

Analysis: Three factors contributed to make the February 21 edition of *Raw* the highest-rated episode since September 7, 2009. It was the night following the Elimination Chamber pay-per-view, it was the official kickoff to WrestleMania season, and The Rock's return via satellite the previous week had been the talk of the wrestling world. Considering the interest that The Rock's taped promos generated for *Raw*, it was surprising that WWE's flagship program didn't reach the 4.0-mark when the "Great One" *finally* came back to Chicago and WWE on March 28. *Raw's* numbers in the four weeks leading up to WrestleMania 27 were about the same as they were in the 'Mania run-ups of 2009 and 2010. Interestingly, Shawn Michaels' retirement speech on the March 29, 2010, edition attracted more viewers than The Rock's return on March 28 of this year.

SMACKDOWN [Syfy]

February 4: 2.0
February 11: 1.8
February 18: 2.1
February 25: 2.3
March 4: 2.0
March 11: 1.9
March 18: 2.1
March 25: 2.0

Analysis: What caused *Smackdown* to score its best rating in several years on February 25? Was it Dusty Rhodes helping son Cody unmask Rey Mysterio Jr.? Was it Wade Barrett vs. The Big Show? Or was it because Vickie Guerrero teamed with Dolph Ziggler in the main event to face Kelly Kelly and World champion Edge? All of those might have been good reasons to tune in to *Smackdown*, but there's no doubt the blue brand benefited from *Raw's* momentum that week. *Smackdown* hadn't scored a 2.3 on a Friday night since its CW days. Thanks to that big number, *Raw* and *Smackdown* had the distinction of being the most-watched programs in all of cable on their respective nights that week. Sorry, *The O'Reilly Factor*. Sorry, *American Pickers*. Sorry, *Pawn Stars*. All of you went down in defeat to WWE!

SUPERSTARS [WGN America]

February 3: 0.7
February 10: 0.7
February 17: 0.5
February 24: 0.6
March 3: 0.6
March 10: 0.5
March 17: 0.5
March 24: 0.6

Analysis: The February 24 edition of *Superstars* was sandwiched between two highly rated editions of *Raw* and *Smackdown*, and featured a first-rate main event pitting then-U.S. champion Daniel Bryan vs. Ted DiBiase Jr. Unfortunately, no amount of WrestleMania hype could boost *Superstars* higher than a 0.6. In fact, *Superstars* didn't score any higher than that in the three weeks leading up to 'Mania 27. It's no surprise that WGN America announced that it was canceling *Superstars*, with the final episode airing on April 7. It's embarrassing for WWE to lose a show due to poor ratings, so why are these debacles allowed to occur? The fact that Tyler Reks faced Chris Masters *four* times during these final weeks indicates why *Superstars*—after a two-year run—will now be buried in the darkest corner of the WWE vault next to *Velocity*.

IMPACT [Spike]

February 3: 1.3
February 10: 1.2
February 17: 1.1
February 24: 1.3
March 3: 1.4
March 10: 1.3
March 17: 1.3
March 24: 1.2

Analysis: Congratulations, TNA. Your ratings are heading in the right direction. While nudging *Impact's* average overall rating from a 1.2 to 1.3 might not be enough to make Dixie Carter pop open any champagne, it does indicate that TNA's flagship program has traction. The March 3 edition was a case in which it seemed that Internet spoilers actually helped boost the show's rating, with fans tuning in to see Sting's World title victory over Jeff Hardy, resulting in a 1.4 for the overall program. That's a far cry from this time last year, when *Impact* failed to reach 1.0 on a consistent basis. The March 3 rating is nearly as impressive as the 1.5 that *Impact* earned when Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff debuted on the show back on January 4, 2010. And we're awaiting Ms. Carter's press release declaring victory over WWE in the Thursday Night War.

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WIN, LOSE, OR DRAW

BY HARRY BURKETT

IN THE WEEKS leading into WrestleMania 27, WWE kept teasing an in-ring confrontation between John Cena and The Rock, Triple-H and The Undertaker played a methodical game of cat-and-mouse, and The Miz simply cut one egomaniacal promo after another. The buildup seemed snail-like at times. Meanwhile, TNA was hitting me with Sting, Jeff Hardy, Rob Van Dam, Mr. Anderson, and Kurt Angle in various main-event incarnations, along with plenty of storyline twists and turns.

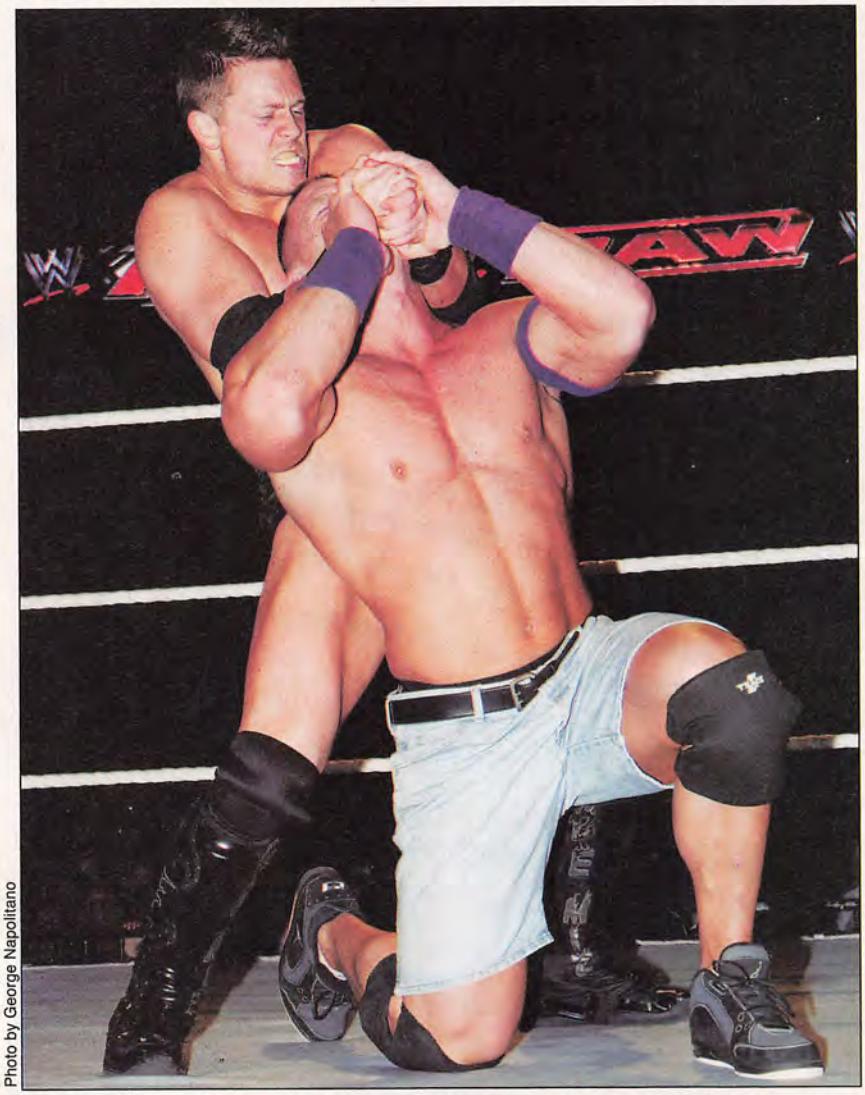

Photo by George Napolitano

The Miz' feud with John Cena has taken a long time to develop, but WWE can tinker with the pace of its storylines given its preeminent position in the wrestling industry, says Harry Burkett.

Raw was engaged in the art of the slow build. *Impact* was delivering, well, total nonstop action. Which was the better approach? Most would say that WWE's success speaks for itself. Maybe it's not that simple.

I'm thinking back to a couple of weeks before WrestleMania. The final match on *Raw* one particular week was Dolph Ziggler eking out a win over John Morrison in a forgettable six-minute match, followed by John Cena cutting a rather immature promo on The Rock, and that was capped by WWE champion The Miz administering a long beatdown on Cena at the end of the show. *Raw* went off the air as The Miz perfected Randy Orton's lingering, menacing stare from the entrance ramp, like a wolf after devouring its prey.

Since WWE has established itself as the preeminent force in pro wrestling, it now has the luxury of slowing its pace, allowing characters to develop slowly, and delivering lackluster main events.

That isn't meant as a subtle jab. Actually, after taking a few years to adapt following the rapid-fire Attitude Era (during which the Intercontinental title would change hands just about every three weeks), WWE is now in an ideal situation. WWE now earns impressive ratings through its cable programming without having to deliver PPV-quality events on a weekly basis. That makes fans more willing to shell out their hard-earned cash on PPVs.

WWE has benefited from one of the best marketing machines in all of sports and entertainment for the past quarter-century. But TNA doesn't enjoy much brand loyalty—at least not yet. Fans don't watch TNA just because it's TNA. Creative is under constant pressure to deliver something new to pry fans and dollars away from WWE.

But it's impossible to come up with something new every week.

Photo by George Tahinos/TNA Wrestling

With RVD, Angle, and Anderson sharing a ring, it could be argued that TNA is trying to cram too much star power into too short a segment. Burkett feels the frenetic pacing of *Impact* can be forgiven considering TNA's mission to attract WWE viewers.

Instead, they have to deliver "all they've got." Three days after I saw the scintillating match between Ziggler and Morrison on *Raw*, I watched *Impact* deliver new World champion Sting, Hulk Hogan, Eric Bischoff, Mr. Anderson, and Rob Van Dam in a mega-summit to open the show; D'Angelo Dinero and Samoa Joe in a three-minute quickie; Ric Flair, Matt Hardy, and AJ Styles in a three-way streetfight; and Sting and RVD vs. Anderson and Jeff Hardy in the main event.

It was all of TNA's star-power at full-wattage. Hulk Hogan? He's the biggest star in wrestling history! Ric Flair? He's arguably the greatest champion of all-time! Sting? He's the icon who has eluded WWE! Van Dam ... Styles ... the accolades could continue. In the meantime, TNA Creative was doing its best to elevate new talent in this ultra-competitive TV ratings environment, giving pushes to Rob Terry, Generation Me, Gunner and Murphy, and others.

From the ease of my office chair, I could offer TNA some very sage advice: Have Hogan appear only once a month. Only allow Flair to wrestle on special occasions. Don't give away Joe-Pope on free TV. Tell Jeff Hardy to go home because you don't really need him.

I can freely give that advice because I'm not in the pressure-cooker. Spike executives are leaning on Dixie Carter for higher ratings. Carter is leaning on Vince Russo and the other members of the booking committee, all of whom are racking their brains trying to think of something that hasn't already been done in the past 30 years. Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff don't want to further tarnish their legacies with a TNA boondoggle.

Meanwhile, WWE is carefully creating its next generation of stars. If TNA doesn't produce great results today, there may be no tomorrow.

TNA seems to be in a no-win situation. Maybe it can't afford not to put 100 percent effort into every outing. Then again, if *Impact* adopted a slower pace, featured longer matches, and became less of a frenetic thrill-ride, then it wouldn't come off as so desperate. Maybe its stars wouldn't come off as pawns that are constantly re-shuffled into different scenarios with unexplained personality transformations.

I'm going to hit the brakes because I don't want to skid into yet another anti-Russo rant. There have been ongoing debates within *PWI* regarding our analyses of TNA's booking, and WWE's, for that matter. In one such exchange, Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda recently said, "Because I have no experience as a booker, I'm not comfortable telling Russo or anybody else how they should be doing their jobs." He makes a valid point.

I routinely criticized Russo during WCW's dying days because the company became a joke from a booking standpoint. And with WCW's high visibility on TNT and TBS, and AOL Time Warner's money and resources behind it, there was no excuse. But TNA is in an entirely different situation, an underdog company that has evolved from the Tennessee State Fairgrounds with Gypsy Joe sitting in the front row to Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, and Spike TV. More importantly, Dixie Carter and Jeff Jarrett have shown undying dedication to their company and their people. And AJ Styles, Beer Money, Samoa Joe, and The Motor City Machine Guns—as well as countless aspiring main-eventers—have wrestled their hearts out over the past several years.

I will try to refrain from criticizing TNA as much. TNA-bashing has run amuck on the Internet. I mean, really, when is the last time you read a positive word about TNA online?

Just as I tolerate WWE's slow-build approach, I will demonstrate more patience with TNA's predicament. Maybe it's true that TNA must progress in a higher gear not just to catch up with WWE, but to survive.

As wrestling fans, we must be careful not to cannibalize what we claim to love through constant carping and over-analysis. It took WWE more than 50 years to evolve into the slick package it is today, and it still makes bone-headed moves at times. Let's be a little more forgiving toward a company that has accomplished so much in only a fifth of that time. I, for one, refuse to be a TNA-hater.

But do we have to see any more wedding vows in a wrestling ring? Okay, I promised not to criticize ... □

THE STRAIGHT SHOOTER

BY DAN MURPHY

WHEN THE EARTHQUAKE struck off the coast of Japan on the afternoon of March 11, independent wrestlers Jake O'Reilly and Shawn Spears were traveling in a tour bus, about 30 miles outside of the northern city of Sendai.

"We felt the bus shaking. We thought we had a flat tire," O'Reilly recalled. "Once we pulled over, we saw the trees moving and the other cars pulling over, and that's when we realized it was an earthquake."

The two Canadians had experienced their first earthquake a few weeks earlier, when the dojo where they were staying was shaken by a small tremor shortly after they had arrived from Ontario for three scheduled tours with All Japan Pro-Wrestling. But earthquakes are common in the islands of Japan, and when this quake struck, O'Reilly and Spears tried to remain as calm as the Japanese crew onboard the tour bus.

Photo by Bill Matthews

Jake O'Reilly, on a tour with All Japan Pro-Wrestling, was on a bus en route to Sendai when the earthquake struck. Despite some tense moments, O'Reilly was able to return home unscathed.

"What struck me was that the earthquake went on for such a long time, maybe two, 2½ minutes," Spears said. "I could tell it was a big one, but we were in the countryside. We had no idea about the damage it caused."

With the bus pulled over to wait out the tremor, the driver turned on the television sets to check the news. The TV monitors showed a map of Japan, with an ominous red circle that covered the northern section of the country. The Japanese began chattering excitedly.

"The news was in Japanese and I didn't understand," O'Reilly said. "I turned to Minoru Suzuki and asked, 'Suzuki-san, what happened?' He said, 'Danger. Tsunami.' I said, 'Where?' And he pointed right into the middle of the red zone."

With the highway they had been traveling upon closed due to damage from the tremor, and facing the prospect of driving along unfamiliar back roads under the threat of a tsunami, the driver opted to keep the bus where it was. They remained there overnight, waiting until sunrise, as most of Northern Japan had lost power.

For 16 hours, the All Japan crew waited through the inky blackness of a tense and uncertain night. Taiyo Kea translated the newscasts for his Canadian compatriots.

Sendai, the city where the bus was headed, was devastated by the tsunami generated by the 9.0 magnitude quake. It was the largest quake ever to hit Japan. Waves up to 30 feet tall slammed into the Japanese coast, sweeping away homes, cars, and trains.

"Fear didn't really sink in until we saw the pictures of the waves coming in," Spears said. "We didn't know where they were. I

Photo by Bill Matthews

O'Reilly and Shawn Spears share a good time with some locals here, but their dream of wrestling in Japan nearly turned into a nightmare under the threat of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear radiation. Despite the hardships they witnessed, both men said they'd return to Japan immediately if asked.

was looking over at the hills outside the window, and I didn't know if a wave would come over those hills at us at any time."

"Honestly, I'm very lucky to be talking to you today," O'Reilly said. "We had been scheduled to leave half-an-hour earlier, but one of the guys was late getting onto the bus. Had he been on time, we would have been in Sendai when the tsunami hit."

The ring crew had arrived before the tour bus and was in Sendai when the waves came in. Luckily, the building they were in remained intact. It was used as an emergency shelter and makeshift morgue.

As word of the magnitude of damage taking place spread, All Japan officials decided to cancel the remainder of the tour, and the bus began making its way back to Yokohama, about 20 miles south of Tokyo. The drive proved to be slow, as the bus navigated back roads and traffic, creeping southward as news continued to filter in.

"We were on the bus for 36 hours total, basically living on protein shakes, water, Snickers bars, and Sapporo beer," O'Reilly said. "As we drove back to Yokohama, we passed through these small towns where the houses had been flattened, and people were lining up in the streets to get fresh water."

Once they were safely back at the All Japan dojo, they were able to log on to cnn.com to read English language news accounts of the tragedy. They were also able to contact friends and family back in Ontario and in the United States to let them know they were safe.

On Sunday, a hydrogen explosion rocked the Fukushima nuclear power plant, spurring concerns of a radiation leak. "The water was contaminated by radiation, so we couldn't drink that. On the last couple days we were there, they didn't want anyone to go outside and risk exposure," Spears said.

The Canadians had been scheduled to remain in Japan until May, but with the status of upcoming shows in question, they met with All Japan management and opted to return home. To get to the airport, they had to catch both a train and a bus, and aftershocks of 7.0 and 6.5 threatened to disrupt travel further. If international flights were grounded, they would be stranded. Fortunately, they were able to get to the airport and make it home without further complications, shaken and saddened by the devastation they had witnessed.

"The training, the living in the dojo, it really creates a bond," O'Reilly said. "I only knew the guys for a month or so, but I still felt guilty leaving them there. I really hope they can rebuild."

Despite the fear and anxiety they experienced, both Spears and O'Reilly hope to return to Japan.

"Wrestling in Japan was a dream come true," said O'Reilly. "If the office called me tomorrow, I would be on the next flight back."

"I'd go back in a heartbeat," Spears said. "My heart is with those people. Millions of people are devastated, without heat and power. It really makes you appreciate the things we take for granted." □

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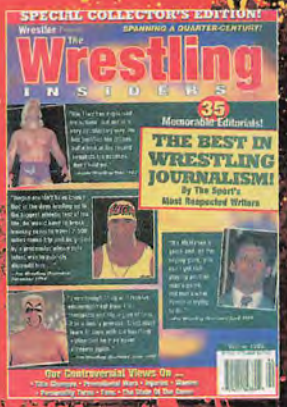
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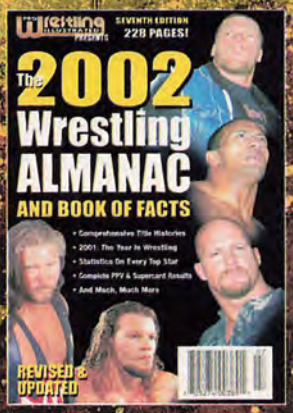

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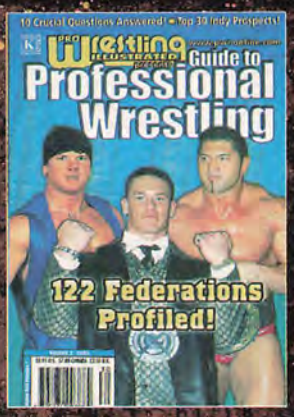
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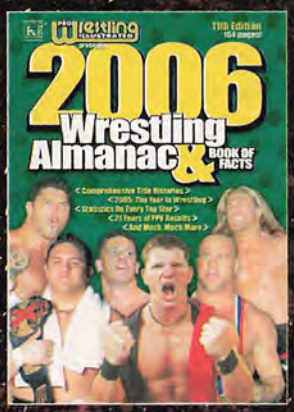

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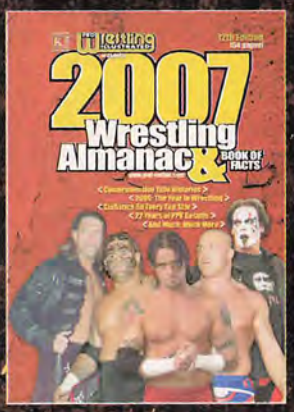

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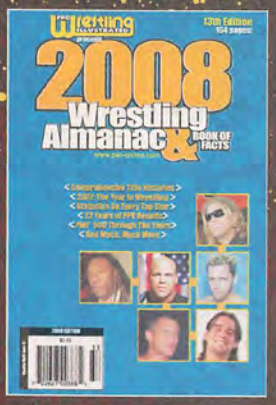

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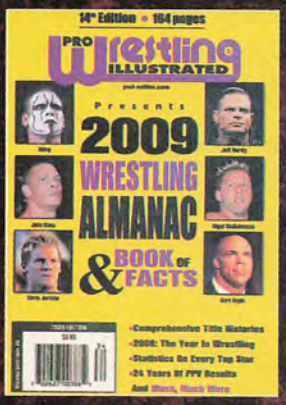

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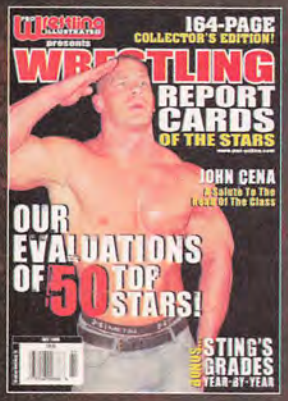

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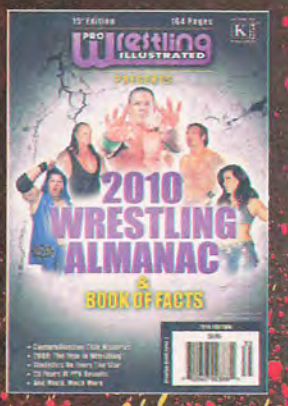

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You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just have to know about this person. Well, these are the **12 questions** you'd never think of asking

12 QUESTIONS

MATT MORGAN

1

You're a tall drink of water. How's the weather up there?
(*Spits*) Raining.

2

When is the last time you felt intimidated?
Honestly, asking my wife's father for his permission to marry her.

3

How did you manage to kick that stuttering habit?
I got hit by a car and landed in Florida.

4

How many hot dogs could you eat in one sitting?
With no time limit? At least 25, easy.

5

Read the book or see the movie?
Read the book every time. It's always better. You take James Patterson books like *Kiss The Girls* and *Along Came A Spider*. They made good movie versions, but the books were much better because they use your personal imagination. Movies create their own situations.

6

What was the strangest match of your career?
It may not have been the strangest match, but one strange moment was my first PPV. It was Lockdown, Team Cage vs. Team Tomko. Sting was on my team. At one point, he took a garbage can lid and whacked me with it. My own teammate. I still don't know why he did it.

7

Lade Gaga: sexy or insane?
Insane. And overrated.

8

What do you really think about the Jeff Hardy title belt?
It's a (expletive) joke. It's an abortion to our business. Unlike Mr. Anderson, if I had won the TNA title, I would have demanded the original belt or had a new belt made. I understand Anderson wore it just to taunt Hardy. To me, the TNA title is more important than wearing that Hot Topic belt just to tweak somebody.

9

An old lady stops you on the street and tells you her cat is stuck in a tree. Do you keep walking or try to climb up after it?
I'm climbing that tree.

10

Where does a seven-footer buy his suits?
You have to have them made, there's no way around it. I used to buy something that almost fit and get it tailored. Now that I've made a little money, I've got a tailor who makes everything for me.

11

Other than *PWI*, what's your favorite magazine?
There are none. I grew up reading the old-school *PWI*. I liked *WOW* when it was around, too. Aren't you going to ask me about the hammer, the midget, and the roulette wheel?

12

What old-school finishing move is due for a comeback?
The DDT, absolutely. It's such a devastating move. You come down with all of your weight on the back of somebody's head as the front of his head is being forced into the mat. That should knock somebody out until next week. These days, you see somebody barely getting a one-count with it. It's very under-sold.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE WRESTLING OBSERVER

HALL OF FAME

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

JOHNNY VALENTINE

HIS LAST NAME may have been Valentine, but Johnny Valentine was no sweetheart in the ring. One of wrestling's most accomplished and respected heels, Valentine made his name by battering opponents with stiff punches and forearms, and infuriating fans with his swagger and methodical attacks.

Born John Wisniski in 1928 in Hobart, Washington, he discovered professional wrestling after meeting former World champion Stanislaus Zbyszko at a local gym. Wisniski was captivated by Zbyszko's stories from the squared circle, and he agreed to move to Missouri to train with Zbyszko.

In 1947, he made his pro debut in Buenos Aires, Argentina, adopting the surname of Valentine from one of his favorite radio serials. He dyed his hair platinum blond and dubbed himself "Handsome" Johnny Valentine.

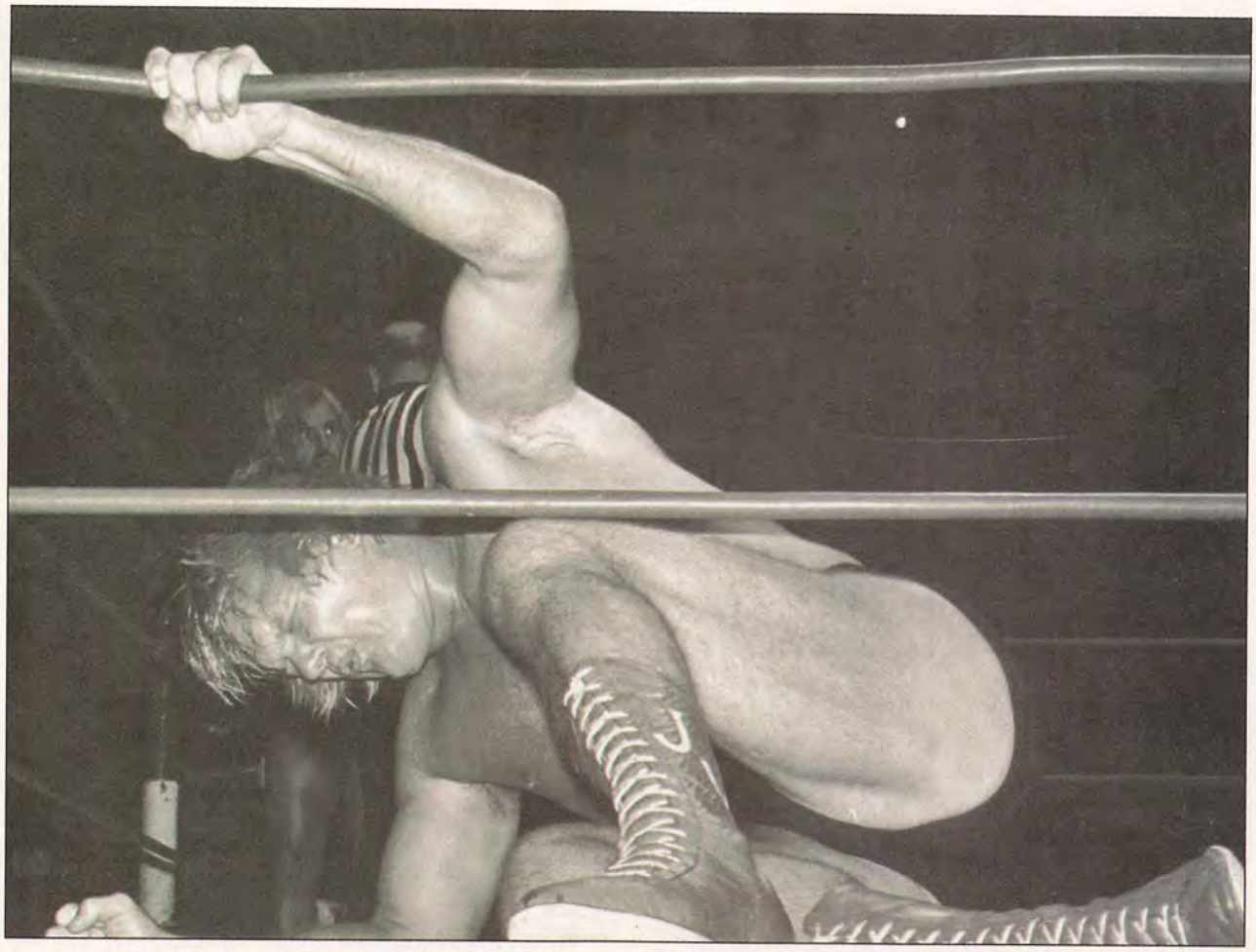
The 6'4", 250-pounder started out as a rulebreaker, forming a tag team with Chet Wallick known as The Atomic Blonds in the Midwest. In 1958, he won a tournament in Chicago, Illinois, to capture the NWA U.S. TV championship. He went on to form a championship tag team with fellow Hall-of-Famer Buddy Rogers and feuded with The Fabulous Kangaroos over the NWA U.S. tag team title.

Valentine became a fan favorite when he split with Rogers, but the turn didn't change his ring style one bit. Even as a babyface, Valentine was an ornery man, blistering opponents with his "brainbuster" elbowsmash and stiff forearms shivers.

In the mid-1960s, Valentine made several successful tours of Japan, where he feuded with a young Antonio Inoki. In 1966, he toured the World Wide Wrestling Federation, winning the F U.S. tag team championship with "Cannonball" Tony Parisi. He also unsuccessfully challenged Bruno Sammartino for the WWWF heavyweight championship.

In September 1972, Valentine won the National Wrestling Federation heavyweight title, which was one of the most prestigious

Johnny Valentine's punishing offense, which featured lots of elbows and forearm blows, earned him a reputation as one of wrestling's all-time toughest competitors.



Valentine thoroughly enjoyed brutalizing opponents, but he was just as proud of his ability to absorb punishment and come back fighting. His career came to a tragic end by a 1975 plane crash.

titles of that era. Valentine held that championship on two occasions, beating Abdullah the Butcher and Johnny Powers to claim the title.

Valentine's greatest strength was his tough-guy aura. His physical, no-nonsense style gave the impression that he was a true sadist.

"He just had that style that made him look so tough that everybody believed he was for real," Jack Brisco was quoted as saying in the book *The Pro Wrestling Hall Of Fame: The Heels*. "He just had a charisma about him that was second to none."

Valentine was a widely traveled competitor who established himself as a title contender all over the globe. He won more than 30 championships throughout the United States, Canada, and Japan, and feuded with the likes of Sammartino, Lou Thesz, Harley Race, the Funks, Jacques Rougeau Sr., and The Sheik.

In 1970, his son, John Jr., made his pro wrestling debut. In 1974, the son adopted his father's ring name and began competing as Greg "The Hammer" Valentine. He was billed as Johnny's younger brother to conceal Johnny's true age.

On October 4, 1975, Valentine's wrestling career came to a tragic end. Valentine was traveling with Ric Flair, David Crockett, Bob Bruggers, and Tim Woods in a private plane, a twin-engine Cessna. The airplane ran out of fuel and crashed near Wilmington, North Carolina, killing the pilot.

Both Flair and Valentine suffered broken backs in the accident. Flair was able to recover; Valentine was not. Valentine was left partially paralyzed and required crutches for the rest of his life. Valentine briefly worked a manager in the Texas territory, but retired shortly thereafter.

In 2000, Valentine sustained injuries in a household fall. Pneumonia, collapsed lungs, and kidney failure followed. He died on April 21, 2001. He was posthumously awarded with the 2001 Editors' Award (now the Stanley Weston Award) for lifetime achievement from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED.

Valentine was a main-event competitor and major draw for three decades. He was respected for his slow and deliberate ring psychology, his rugged offense, and his durability as a marquee attraction. He was a major influence on the likes of Flair, Roddy Piper, and, of course, his son, Greg. He is a charter member of *The Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame. □

INSIDE Wrestling BACK ISSUES

Be sure to fill in the gaps in your collection of "the magazine that rips the lid off pro wrestling!" INSIDE WRESTLING gives you all the information you need to keep up with the pro wrestling scene!

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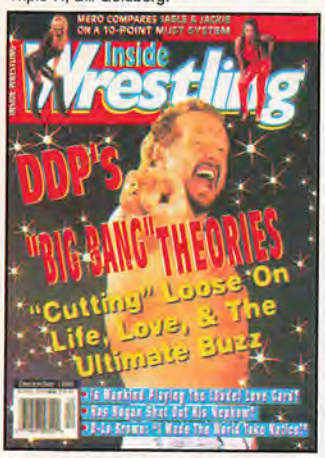
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INDEPENDENT ROUNDUP

BY AL ALVEN

IN RECENT YEARS, WrestleMania weekend has become a time for some of the country's top independent promotions to shine. In the shadow of WWE's signature event, both Ring of Honor and Dragon Gage USA hosted multiple shows in Atlanta, with several major developments arising.

The biggest news came on the first night of a pair of ROH shows at Center Stage, the former taping location of *WCW Saturday Night*. There, **Shelton Benjamin** and **Charlie Haas**—now known as **Wrestling's Greatest Tag Team**—defeated **The Kings of Wrestling** (**Chris Hero** & **Claudio Castagnoli**) to become the 30th ROH tag team champions. With the victory, Benjamin and Haas also became the first duo to have held the ROH and WWE tag team titles.

"Tonight was all about redemption and affirmation," explained Haas, who forced Hero to tap out to his Haas of Pain finisher while Benjamin took care of Castagnoli with a superplex. "We lost to them in our ROH debut back at Glory by Honor IX, but that only motivated us."

Added Benjamin: "They are an amazing tag team, but tonight, we proved that we are just a little bit better. We believe these belts prove that we're the best in the world. But if there are still any doubts, we look forward to erasing them by defending against all comers."

In other title action, recently crowned ROH champion **Eddie Edwards** made his first successful defense against ROH TV champion **Christopher Daniels** in an emotional affair. Afterward, the "Fallen Angel" refused to shake hands with Edwards, rekindling memories of Daniels' disdain for the Code of Honor while heading **The Prophecy** stable during ROH's infancy.

A return match is being discussed, but a challenge from the man Edwards took the title from at Manhattan Mayhem IV, **Roderick Strong**, is likely to be next.

Meanwhile, across town, DGUSA was also making its mark in "A-Town" with back-to-back events at the Presidential Ballroom.

All eyes were on **YAMATO**, who made his first two successful defenses of the Open the Freedom Gate title, scoring big wins over **Austin Aries** and **Akira Tozawa**, respectively.

Aries entered the weekend with aspirations of "becoming the face of Dragon Gate USA," claiming he would leave the promotion if he were unable to take the championship from YAMATO. He went back on his word, though, turning on **Ronin** (**Chuck Taylor**, **Johnny Gargano**, & **Rich Swann**) and joining up with **The Blood Warriors**.

"The fans can boo me all they want, I couldn't care less. You see, I now understand my destiny. I have found new purpose and direction under **CIMA**. Together with my new brothers, we will rule Dragon Gate USA," explained Aries, who also joins **Naruki Doi**, **Dragon Kid**, **Ryo Saito**, **Genki Horiguchi**, **Gamma**, **Brodie Lee**, and **Ricochet** in the company's most dangerous stable.

Photo by George Napolitano

Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas not only captured their first championship together since winning the WWE title in 2003, but they curtailed The Kings of the Wrestling's record ROH reign two days shy of a full year.

Photo by Dan McMillan

Yamato, shown battling BxB Hulk, was the star of DGUSA's WrestleMania weekend shows, during which he turned away Austin Aries and Akira Tozowa.

CIMA and Ricochet came close to unseating Open the United Gate champions **Masato Yoshino** and **PAC**, of the World-1 faction, but were turned away in what many described as the best match of the weekend.

A few weeks before her WWE Hall of Fame induction at WrestleMania 27, **Tammy "Sunny" Sytch** made a guest appearance at a Tri-State Wrestling Alliance card in Voorhees, New Jersey, where she officiated the **Brittany Force** vs. **Kacee Carlisle** bout.

Though she did an admirable job of staying on top of the action, the friction between Carlisle and Sytch was obvious from the opening bell, and it is hard to disagree with Carlisle, who says she was cheated out of a victory. "Sunny and her fast count was the only reason I lost that match!" Carlisle complained. "Is she even a referee? Where's her license? The decision-makers at TWA are gonna hear from me!"

Sytch later had an in-ring confrontation with ECWA manager **Magnum**, and attacked Magnum and his charge **Bobby Shields** toward the end of his match against **Tony Stetson**.

In an example of how using the Internet to get noticed can work, NWA East's **Lou Marconi** appears to be inching closer to scoring a title shot at new NWA heavyweight champion **Colt Cabana**.

For the past several months, Marconi has been persistent in sending videos to the NWA brass, demanding championship opportunities against a variety of regional and national titleholders.

After Cabana captured the famous "10 Pounds Of Gold" from **Adam Pearce**, Marconi claimed he had proof that he had Cabana "running scared." The video he produced was actually from a few years back, and featured a light-hearted Cabana having some fun with Marconi during a holiday promo.

Still, the NWA recently featured the clip on nwawrestling.com, and by doing so, helped Marconi play up his cause. Even though a title match has yet to be announced, Marconi certainly got the attention of NWA officials.

What has happened to **Josh Daniels**? The former clean-cut, technical powerhouse seems to have gone over the edge in Maryland Championship Wrestling, where he is now known as "The American Psycho."

Daniels has become obsessed with injuring opponents. His lat-

est victim was young **Kindred**, who had to be carried out on a stretcher after being kicked in the head by Daniels during a match at the Xtreme Measures event. Apparently, Daniels took the title of that event to heart.

Most disconcerting, though, has been the series of video blogs the 11-year vet has sent in to the marylandwrestling.com, where he not only expresses pleasure in hurting others, but admits regret that Kindred suffered only a bruised jaw.

Fellow vet **Vordell Walker** has since stepped up to the plate and challenged Daniels. The entire MCW lockerroom will be watching, especially after Daniels' claimed in response that he will hurt Walker worse than he's ever hurt anyone else.

For the first time in its five-year history, Pro Wrestling Guerrilla's Dynamite Duumvirate Tournament did not crown new tag team champions or force existing titleholders to defend through each of its three rounds.

This year's DDT4, instead, was used to establish a new set of number-one contenders for the PWG tag team title, currently held by **Peligro Abejas** (**El Generico** & **Paul London**).

Generico and London defeated **The Young Bucks** for the gold in the final round of last year's event; thus, it was only fitting that the Bucks would go on to defeat the **Nightmare Violence Connection** (**Akira Tozawa** & **Kevin Steen**) in the finals this time around.

With the win, the Bucks became two-time DDT4 champions, having also won the tournament in 2009 while in the midst of a record 616-day run with the title. The brothers, who also compete in TNA as **Generation Me**, dedicated their performance to none other than TNA President **Dixie Carter**, amid a chorus of boos.

"The rules may have changed, but we're coming to take back what is ours," warned **Max Buck**. "Generico, London ... it's only a matter of time, and you both know it. Shine those belts up real nice for us."

Photo by Frank Krewda

The crowd was thrilled when Tammy Sytch showed up at a Tri-State Wrestling Alliance show as a referee in late-March. But Kacee Carlisle, choking Brittney Force, wasn't happy about it. Carlisle claims Sytch's biased officiating cost her the match ... and she was right.

B.J. Whitmer is considered one of the all-time greats in his home promotion, the Ohio-based Heartland Wrestling Association. Up until recently, however, he had only a single reign as HWA champion on his resume to show for it. That all changed when the former ROH competitor surprised big **Gerome Phillips** at the Hysteria card to claim the title for a second time. Phillips, who recently cut ties with manager **Andre Davis**, is said to be dead-set on regaining the gold.

Whitmer's first run with the title, back in 2008, was cut short due to injury.

Reports just prior to press time indicate that WWE has signed **Jon Moxley** to a developmental deal. He is expected to report to Florida Championship Wres-

Photo by Tim Walker

Josh Daniels, pinning Kindred, has recently shocked and stunned Maryland Championship Wrestling's fans and wrestlers with some bizarre and violent behavior. MCW veteran Vordell Walker has since challenged Daniels.

tling in the near future.

The 6'4", 220-pound "Street Dog" from Cincinnati has competed for a variety of promotions over the past six years, most notably CHIKARA Pro, Combat Zone Wrestling, EVOLVE, Full Impact Pro, and DGUSA. Moxley is a two-time former CZW champion and presently holds FIP's heavyweight title.

Recent Title Changes:

High Velocity Wrestling, Hendersonville, NC, March 12: Alex Avgerinos pinned Scott Pitt to win the HVW Southeastern title ... The Destruction Crew (Tank Hurley & Bulldozer) defeated tag team champions LOL (Dylan Dollar & Will Balderas) and Attention Deficit Disorder (Manchild & Jamie Lee) in a triple-threat match to win the title ... **Ground Xero Wrestling, Prince George, VA, March 12:** Mitchapalooza beat Phil Brown for the GXW heavyweight title ... **Vendetta Pro Reflexion, Santa Maria, CA, March 12:** Joey Kaos pinned Rik Luxury for the VPR heavyweight title ... **Elite Pro Wrestling Alliance, Keyser, WV, March 18:** Sonjay Dutt beat Robbie Paige and Joseph Brooks in a triple-threat match to claim the vacant EPWA cruiserweight title ... **Millennium Wrestling Federation, Melrose, MA, March 19:** Shelton Benjamin pinned Slyk Wagner Brown to win the MWF heavyweight title ... Rick Fuller & Brian Milonas won a Royal Rumble match to win the MWF tag team title ... **Florida Championship Wrestling, Miami, FL, March 25:** Richie Steamboat & Seth Rollins beat Damien Sandow & Titus O'Neil to win the FCW tag team title ... **Insane Wrestling League, Chino, CA, March 25:** Paul London pinned Eric Cross to win the IWL heavyweight title ... Cothern beat Johnny Saovi, Famous B, and Willie Mack in a four-way elimination match to win the vacant IWL Anarchy championship ... **Metro East Championship Wrestling, Wood River, IL, March 26:** Eric Allen beat MECW Great Plains champion Zach Thompson and Barry Ryte in a triple-threat match for the title ... Mike Anthony & Sarin Sinn defeated The Bowery Brawlers (Mad Dog McDowell & Mauler McDarby) for the MECW tag team title ... **SHIMMER, Berwyn, IL, March 27:** Daizee Haze & Tomoka Nakagawa defeated Hiroyo Matsumoto & Misaki Ohata for the SHIMMER tag team title. □

THE INTERNATIONAL REPORT

BY BILL MELTZER

THE NEVER-ENDING promotional battles in Puerto Rico between **Carlos Colon's** World Wrestling Council and **Savio Vega's** International Wrestling Association have seesawed back and forth throughout their history. The WWC battled back from the brink of extinction to take the upper hand the past few years, but the IWA recently scored a couple of major coups in their favor.

IWA officials are crowing about the fact that the IWA heavyweight championship feud between **Dennis Rivera** and former WWE prospect **Eric Escobar** has done equal or better box office than WWC's more high-profile return of **Carly Colon** (formerly **Carlito** in WWE). Less than four years removed from making his pro wrestling debut after being trained by **Alex "Lightning" Cruz**, Rivera has emerged over the past year as the fastest-rising star on the island. The younger brother of Vega, Rivera has reportedly drawn interest from WWE and TNA as a developmental candidate.

Once Rivera's set of matches with Escobar runs its course, his next feud will inevitably be with **Ricky "El Mesias" Banderas**. WWC publicly denied that Banderas, who was feuding with Carly Colon and recently captured the Universal heavyweight championship from 12-time champion Colon, would be leaving the promotion for IWA. One week later, however, the former TNA wrestler made first appearance in IWA in several years, defeating **Phoenix Ray**.

Meanwhile, the title reign of IWA tag team champions **Atomo** and **Sonico** was immediately endangered by the announcement that the most decorated Puerto Rican tag team in history, **Reynaldo "Thunder" Rodriguez** and **Alex "Lightning" Cruz**, would be leaving WWC to return the IWA. Over the course of their careers, Thunder and Lightning have already won a staggering 29 tag team championships together (23 in WWC, 6 in IWA). Lightning is also a former holder of the IWA heavyweight championship and held an IWA tag team championship with **Anarchy** as his partner. Immediately upon making their return to IWA, Rodriguez and Cruz announced they were setting their sights on their 30th championship and issued a challenge to Atomo and Sonico.

Despite the financial hit and logistical complications from the natural disaster that rocked Japan, New Japan decided to go full-speed ahead with its first U.S. tour. A few weeks prior to leaving Japan for the tour, IWGP champion **Hiroshi Tanahashi** overcame veteran J-Cup winner **Yuji Nagata** in an epic 35-minute battle that many have deemed the best match outside North America so far this year.

One of the biggest upsets in recent international wrestling history took place in Japan's annual Super Jr. Tournament. Independent wrestler **Daisuke Sasaki**, a **Dick Togo** trainee best known for his work in the DDT promotion, was considered an afterthought brought in to round out the Block A bracket. Instead, he shockingly won his bracket to earn a spot in the Best of the Super Jr. Tournament. In the Block A finale, Sasaki pulled off a clean win against heavily favored former All Japan and Pro Wrestling NOAH performer **Tsuyoshi Kikuchi**.

After a tour of New Japan (and a WWE tryout) failed to produce any long-term opportunities for Australian wrestlers **Mikey Nicolls** and **Shane Haste**, both men turned up at the Pro Wrestling NOAH dojo in early-spring for

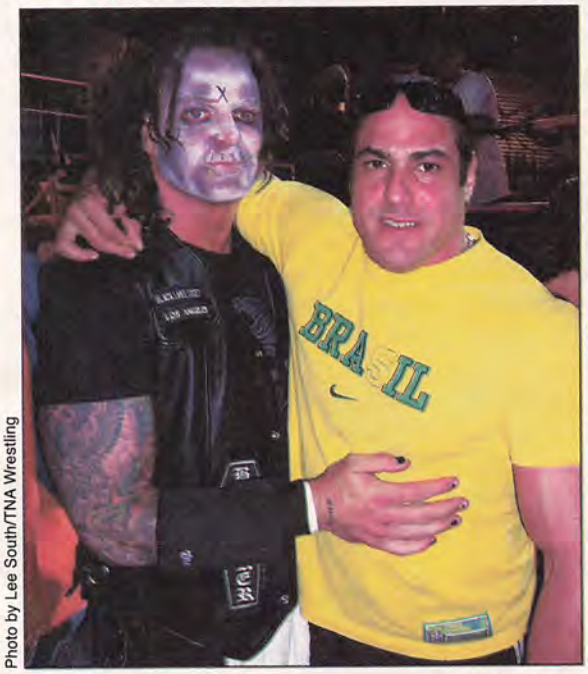


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Ricky Banderas (right) might be chummy with Vampiro, but you probably won't catch him hugging Carly Colon these days. Their feud over the WWC Universal championship has been hot, but not nearly the cash cow WWC was hoping for. Now, there's even talk that Banderas might jump to rival IWA.

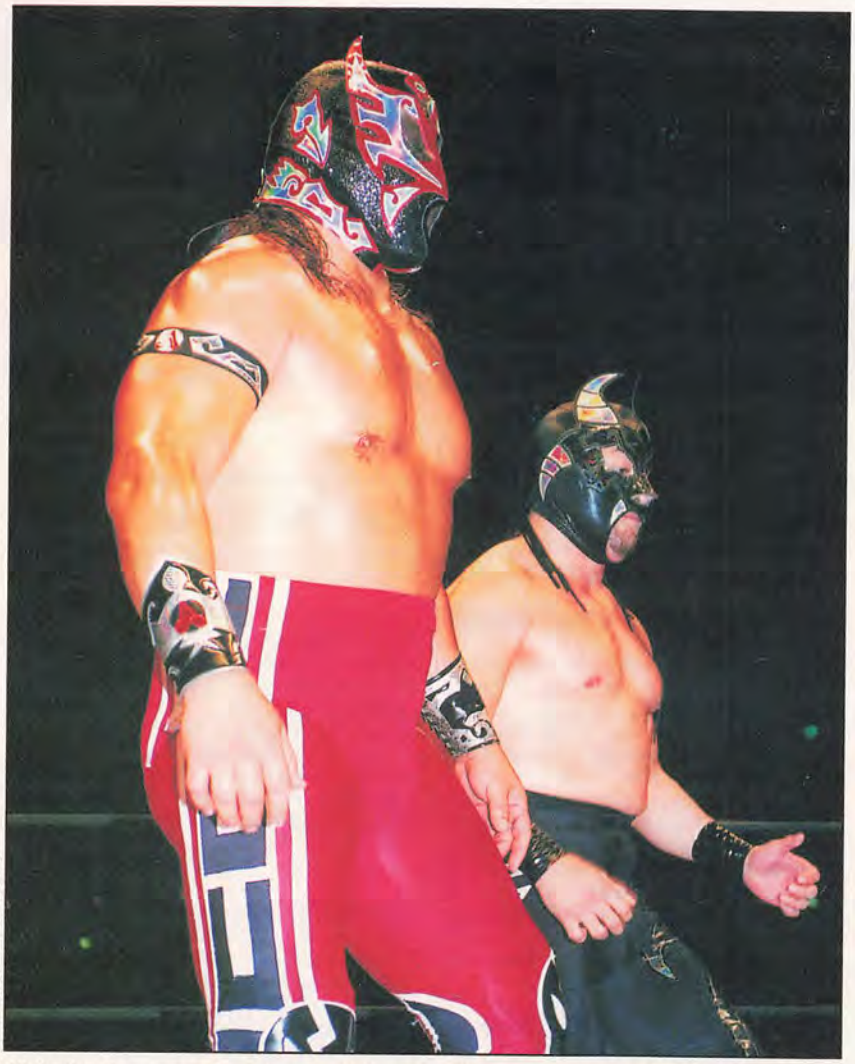


Photo by Koichi Yoshizawa

While the departure of Mistico to WWE is hardly good news for CMLL, it has been a boon to Ultimo Guerrero, who's profile has risen even higher since Mistico left.

training. So far, their matches, singles and tag, have turned heads both in Japan and in their native Australia. Despite their modest win-loss record, Nicolls and Haste have worked their way into NOAH's regular lineup by virtue of strong matches against the likes of veterans **Takashi Sugiura**, **Mohammed Yone**, and **Kensuke Sasaki**. Those who have seen the Aussies in action anticipate that they'll make a big impact in the promotion before their three-month commitment expires.

Mexican lucha libre titan CMLL has been putting on a brave face since losing its biggest star, **Mistico** (now **Sin Cara**), to WWE. In the short term, the promotion has ramped-up the storyline pitting its other A-list international superstar, **Ultimo Guerrero**, against fellow veteran masked standout **Mr. Niebla** for the CMLL heavyweight championship.

In the meantime, AAA has confirmed that its TripleMania 19 event will take place (for the fourth straight year) at Mexico City's *Palacio de los Deportes.* At last year's show, top star **Dr. Wagner Jr.** captured his second AAA heavyweight championship from **Electroshock**. This year, current titlist **El Zorro** will continue his campaign to drive **Los Bizzaros** out of the promotion. The rudo leader of **La Sociedad** has feuded especially intensely with Bizzaros faction member **Charly Manson**.

"Big" Vito Lograsso recently returned from the Golden Cine Professional Wrestling organization's second tour of Nepal with a new title. On February 24, Lograsso defeated **The Himalayan Tiger** before a crowd of 20,000 people at Katmandu's Dasharath Stadium to become the first-ever "Professional Wrestling Champion Of Nepal." While local fans were certainly not happy to see Lograsso take the championship from their hero, this year's tour concluded without controversy. Last spring, Lograsso incited a riot among 4,000 fans who were outraged by his treatment of Tiger, a local favorite.

EMLL suffered an embarrassing setback when a recent card at Guadalajara's storied *Arena Coliseo* drew a mere 250 fans to the show. In the main event, a six-man tag team match, **La Peste Negra** (**Negro Casas**, **Felina**, & **Mr. Niebla**) defeated the team of **Mascara Dorada**, **Rush**, and **Toscano**. Despite the small facility's long-established tradition as a lucha libre hotbed and ticket prices that cost the equivalent of $10 U.S., attendance was abysmal.

The lucha libre world is mourning the recent deaths of CMLL wrestler **Fabian El Gitano** and old-time star and modern-era executive **Hahn "Don Felipe" Lee**. Fabian, 39, officially died of a pancreatic hemorrhage, but there was evidence of a physical struggle prior to his death, and an investigation was ongoing as of press time.

The 80-year-old Lee died of natural causes. Lee, a Mexican citizen of Korean heritage, made his debut in the mid-1950s. Around 1960, he caught the eye of **Lou Thesz**, who introduced him to NWA promoters in the U.S. Lee toured the U.S. mainland and Hawaii as Ham Lee and Bing Kai Lee while also working in Mexico under the latter ring name. Post retirement, Lee became the chairman of the Federal *Box y Lucha* Commission, the government-sponsored body in Mexico City designed to regulate prizefighting and wrestling. □

ARENA REPORTS

We encourage promoters and readers to e-mail results to:

PWIResults@yahoo.com

Please try to utilize the exact format you see in the "Arena Reports." Also, please distinguish between handicap matches and three- or four-way matches. And, when reporting the result of a handicap match, indicate the number of competitors and who was the last man eliminated. Finally, please note pinfall finishes. Following these guidelines will help us greatly and make it more likely that your report will be used.

SPOTLIGHT CARD OF THE MONTH

FLORIDA

ORLANDO—TNA Victory Road at the Impact Zone: **Tommy Dreamer** pinned **Bully Ray** in a no-DQ, falls-count-anywhere match ... **Rosita** & **Sarita** beat Knockouts tag team champions **Angelina Love** & **Winter** for the title ... **Hernandez** beat **Matt Morgan** in a first-blood match ... X division champion **Kazarian** beat **Robbie E**, **Max Buck**, and **Jeremy Buck** in an Ultimate X match ... Tag team champions **Beer Money Inc.** (**James Storm** & **Robert Roode**) defeated **Ink Inc.** (**Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) ... **AJ Styles** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Rob Van Dam** vs. **Mr. Anderson** ended in a double-countout ... World champion **Sting** pinned **Jeff Hardy**.
(03-13-11)

—Spotlight Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

UNITED STATES

ARKANSAS

HARRISON—Mid-States Wrestling at the Mid-States Boxing Gym: **Bubba Hall** defeated **Jim Fallon** by countout ... **Adrian Steel** defeated **The Mauler** ... **The Canadian Red Devil** beat **Cold Blooded Chris** ... **Tony Raze** & **Cobra Kai** defeated **Jason Jones** & **Jamie Lynn** in an intergender match ... Independent Wrestling International champion **Gary Gram** vs. **Stephen E** ended in a double-DQ.
(03-19-11)

—Kel Varnson

WEST MEMPHIS—NEW at the NEW Arena: **Jon Alan** beat **Moe Stegall** ... **Austin Lane** pinned **Tatt2** ... **Matt Riviera** defeated **Dan Matthews** ... **Kid Nikels** & Jon Alan beat Austin Lane & Moe Stegall.
(03-19-11)

—Evan Colling

CALIFORNIA

SAN DIEGO—New Wave Pro Wrestling at the Clairemont Mesa Boys & Girls Club: **Johnny Yuma** pinned **Johnny Paradise** ... **Team Santino Bros. Wrestling Academy** (**Joey Kaos**, **Ray Rosas**, **Jezabel**, **Robbie Phoenix**, & **Duke**) defeated **Team NWPW School** (**SoCal Crazy**, **Ryan Kidd**, **Nightmare Azteca**, **Andre Machevski**, & **Joey Barone**) ... **B-Boy** defeated **Brandon Parker**, **Scorpio Sky**, and **T.J. Perkins** in a four-way ... **Chris Kadillak** won a 20-man battle royal ... **Rocky Romero** pinned **Angel Santos** ... **Tommy Wilson** pinned **Babi Slymm** ... Heavyweight champion **Locura** pinned **Akira Tozawa**.
(03-26-11)

—Chad Simplicio

CHINO—Insane Wrestling League at American Legion Post #299: **Jeremy Buck** defeated **Simon Lotto** and **Steven Andrews** in a three-way ... **Candice LeRae** pinned **Tab Jackson** ... **Justin Ryke** pinned **Riki De La Paz** ... **Chris Kadillak** pinned **Ray Rosas** ... Tag team champions **Mixtape Kings** (**Jerome Robinson** & **Jacob Diez**) defeated **Violence Unlimited** (**Tyler Bateman** & **Funnybone**) ... **Cothern** defeated **Johnny Saovi**, **Famous B**, and **Willie Mack** in a four-way elimination match for the vacant Anarchy championship ... **Paul London** pinned heavyweight champion **Eric Cross** for the title.
(03-25-11)

—Chad Simplicio

OCEANSIDE—So-Cal Pro Wrestling at the Boys & Girls Club: **Damage Control** (**Dieter Von Doom** & **Duke**) defeated **FTW** (**Ryan Kidd** & **Eddie Randall**) ... **Nick Lovin** pinned **Brandon Parker** ... **Johnny Yuma** pinned **Angel Santos** ... **Johnny Paradse** pinned **Johnny Goodtime** ... **SoCal Crazy** defeated **Peter Avalon** by submission ... Tag team champions **Todd Chandler** & **Kid Caramba** defeated **Tommy Wilson** & **Ricky Mandel**.
(03-19-11)

—Chad Simplicio

ANAHEIM—Mach-1 Wrestling at the American Sports Center: **Kyle Webb** pinned **Kid Vegas** ... **Peter Avalon** pinned **Gregory Sharpe** ... **Jarek Matthews** pinned **Ray Rosas** ... **Cedric the Hitman** pinned **Brian Weston** ... **Brian Kendrick** pinned **Joey Ryan** ... **James Morgan**, **Leo Blaze**, & **Josh Rozay** defeated **Willie Mack**, **Nick Madrid**, & **Andrew Hellman**.
(03-18-11)

—Chad Simplicio

SANTA MARIA—Vendetta Pro Reflexion at Lakeview Jr. High: **Famous B** pinned **Eric Cross** ... **Sunami** & **Kadin Anthony** defeated **Diego Hernandez** & **Jesse Jimenez** ... **Nathan Graves** pinned **Lucha Machine** ... **Gangrel** pinned **Disco Machine** ... **Dana Lee** defeated **Ray Rosas** & **Jardi Frantz** in a three-way elimination match ... **Joey kAos** pinned heavyweight champion **Rik Luxury** for the title ... **Shannon Ballard** & **ThunderKitty** defeated **OMEGA** & **Buggy** ... **Carlito** pinned **Billy Blade**.
(03-12-11)

—Joseph Duncan

This blow-up doll isn't going to offer Bully Ray much protection from a diving Tommy Dreamer. Ray's not saying if the doll offered any consolation after his shoulders were pinned to the mat in this no-DQ, falls-count-anywhere match-up of former ECW legends.

SIMI VALLEY—Millennium Pro Wrestling at the Yankee Doodles Nightclub: **Chris Kadillak** pinned **Peter Avalon** ... **Brian Cage** pinned **Freddy Bravo** ... **Fern Owen** pinned **Terex** ... Ladies champion **Nikki** pinned **Amanda** ... Tag team champions **Anchors Away (David E. Jones** & **Ryan Stone**) defeated **Territory Kings (Mario Banks** & **Whiskey Fists MacIntosh**) ... **Bo Cooper** defeated **Hobo** & **Hanes Classic** in a handicap match ... **Spector** defeated **Hellkid** by DQ ... **Maximum** champion **Lethal Logan X** beat **Jarek Matthews** by submission ... **Rocky Romero** & **Akira Tozawa** defeated **Ryan Taylor** & **Brandon Parker**. (03-12-11)

—Chad Simplicio

HAYWARD—APW Gym Wars at The Garage: **Mr. Wrestling #4** pinned **CORVUS** ... **Dave Dutra** pinned **Mikey Jay** ... **JECKLES** pinned **Vennis DeMarco** ... **Derek Sanders** & **Alexis Darevko** defeated **Jody Kristofferson** & **Will Rood** ... Internet champion **Matt Carlos** pinned **Sheik Khan Abadi** ... Heavyweight champion **Dylan Drake** beat **BLACKWELL** by DQ. (03-12-11)

—Joseph Duncan

COLORADO

GOLDEN—IWF Premiere Pro Wrestling at the Buffalo Rose: **Patrick McDaniels** defeated **Rose Thorn, Sensi Dalton**, and **Paul Stetich** in a four-way intergender match ... Heavyweight champion **Trajan Ender** beat **Johnny Crash** ... **Ronin the Rock 'n' Roll Vampire** defeated **Damien Payne** ... **Brandon Morris** beat **Jason Noel** ... **Hoodlum** beat **Jay Synn** and **Bronx** in a three-way ... **Jack Mecidal** defeated **Candyman** ... **Rob Ryzin** defeated **Arik Angel** ... NEW Hardcore champion **Bud Doobie** beat **Prodigee, Joseph A. Kincade**, & **Juntsu** in a four-way Beetlejuice Memorial match. (03-13-11)

—Tamera Halbeisen

CONNECTICUT

TORRINGTON—Northeast Wrestling at the Torrington High School Gymnasium: **Tommy Dreamer** beat **Ron Zombie, Ryan McBride**, & **Hale Collins** in a four-man tables match ... **Bull Dredd** defeated **Cedric Alexander** ... **Sgt. Slaughter** & **Pvt. Jeff Starr** beat **Caleb Konley** & **Jake Manning** ... **Brian Anthony** beat **Tommaso Ciampa** ... **Eddie Edwards** defeated **Adam Cole** ... **Matt Taven** pinned **Robbie E.** ... **Matt Hardy** beat **Mike Bennett**. (03-26-11)

—Tim Walker

HARTFORD—WWE Raw at the XL Center: **Randy Orton** beat WWE champion **The Miz** by DQ ... **Santino Marella, Vladimir Kozlov**, & **Evan Bourne** beat **Zack Ryder, Primo**, & **Tyson Kidd** ... **R-Truth** pinned **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **The Great Khali** beat **Alex Riley** ... U.S. champion **Sheamus** pinned **Daniel Bryan** in a streetfight ... **John Morrison** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... Randy Orton & **John Cena** defeated The Miz & **CM Punk**. (03-18-11)

—Louie Dee

FLORIDA

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Scott Steiner** defeated **Jesse Neal** ... **Max Buck** beat **Jeremy Buck** ... **Winter** defeated **Velvet Sky** ... **Matt Hardy, Abyss**, & **Bully Ray** beat **Rob Van Dam, Sting**, & **Mr. Anderson** in a cage match. (03-31-11)

—Duane Long

Angelina Love drives Rosita hard to the canvas, but cannot follow up with a pin. Rosita and Sarita emerged from this match as the new Knockouts tag team champions. And not only did Love and Winter drop the title, they are steaming at Velvet Sky, whose involvement they blame for the loss.

MIAMI—FCW at Miami-Dade County Fair: **Mason Ryan** won a battle royal ... **Brett DiBiase** beat **Bo Rotundo, Husky Harris**, and **Michael McGillicutty** in a Fatal 4-way ... **Xavier Woods** defeated **Conor O'Brian** ... **Oksana** defeated **Naomi Night** ... Heavyweight champion **Lucky Cannon** defeated **Tito Colon** and **Hunico** in a triple-threat ... **Richie Steamboat** & **Seth Rollins** beat tag team champions **Damien Sandow** & **Titus O'Neill** for the title. (03-25-11)

—Duane Long

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Mickie James** pinned **Tara** ... **Okato** beat **D'Angelo Dinero** by DQ ... **Hernandez** & **Anarchia** beat **Matt Morgan** & **Brother Devon** ... **Scott Steiner** & **Crimson** defeated **Ink Inc. (Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) ... **Rob Van Dam** beat **Mr. Anderson** by DQ. (03-24-11)

—Duane Long

JACKSONVILLE—TNA at the Moran Theater: Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** defeated **Mickie James** ... **Matt Morgan** beat **Rob Terry** ... **Samoa Joe** beat **D'Angelo Dinero** ... **Scott Steiner** defeated **Jeff Jarrett** ... **Matt Hardy** vs. **Rob Van Dam** ended in a no-contest. (03-18-11)

—Trent Rigor

ORLANDO—TNA at the Impact Zone: **Crimson** & **Scott Steiner** beat **Ink Inc. (Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) ... **Gunner** beat **Murphy** and **Rob Terry** in a three-way for the vacant TV title ... **Matt Morgan, Winter**, & **Angelina Love** defeated **Sarita, Rosita**, & **Hernandez** in a streetight ... **AJ Styles** vs. **Rob Van Dam** vs. **Bully Ray** vs. **Mr. Anderson** ended in a no-contest. (03-17-11)

—Duane Long

GEORGIA

EASTANOLLEE—Southern Wrestling Association at The BoonDocks Arena: **Damon Frye** pinned **Krymsin** ... **ASAP** beat **Casanova, Johnny Sonset**, and **Jimmy Lee** a fatal four-way ... **LiveWire (Stevie Bryant** & **Venomous**) defeated **2 Guys 1 Cup (Chris Spectra** & **Kevin Blue**) ... Premier champion **Panhead Nelson** pinned **Bam Bam Bradshaw** ... **The Irish Assassins (Jason Blackman** & **JD Jackson**) defeated **Cody Fairview** & **Droxx** ... **Dale Dwindle** pinned **James Boulevard** ... **Donn E.** pinned **The Natural Born Playa** ... Tag team champions **Billy Starr** & **Tommy Sawyer** defeated **Bad Stuff (Bad Jack** & **Adam Mabry**) and **La Costa Nostra (Jon Hogan** & **Alexander Phoenix**) in a triple-threat. (03-26-11)

—Dale Cleveland

AVONDALE ESTATES—Platinum Championship Wrestling at the Academy Theater: **Warhorse #2** & **Warhorse #88** beat **Jay Fury** & **Shane Marx** ... **Pandora** defeated **CAMPUS Strike Force** in a handicap match ... **Mason** pinned **Lee Roy** ... **The Washington Bullets (Jon Williams** & **Trey Williams**) defeated **The Exotic Ones (Rick Michaels** & **Simon Sermon)** ... **Warhorse 3:16** beat **Nemesis** by countout ... **Brandon Kage** beat **Brian Blaze** by DQ. (03-25-11)

—Stephen Platinum

Seems like an odd way to cut a man, but Hernandez knows exactly what he's doing in this first-blood match against Matt Morgan. Hernandez got the nod after squirting the seven-footer with fake blood! Fake blood? What is this sport coming to?

SAVANNAH—TNA at the Martin Luther King Jr. Arena: **Ink Inc. (Jesse Neal & Shannon Moore)** beat **Gunner & Murphy** ... Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** pinned **Angelina Love** ... **Matt Morgan** pinned **Rob Terry** ... **Samoa Joe** beat **D'Angelo Dinero** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Scott Steiner** pinned **Jeff Jarrett**.
(03-19-11)

—Bill Wilkie

WARNER ROBINS—NWA Rampage Pro Wrestling at Johnny G's Fun Center: **Anthony Andrews** defeated **Frankie Valentine** by DQ ... **Drew Adler** pinned **Corey Hollis** ... **Dr. Johnny Gayton & Mr. Jones** defeated **Judge & Bobby Moore** by DQ ... **Kyle Matthews** defeated **Adrian Hawkins** by submission ... **Chip Day, Mike Posey**, & Corey Hollis beat **Sal Rinauro**, Drew Adler, & **Michael Stevens** ... **Murder 1 & AJ Steele** defeated **Dany Only & Stryknyn** ... **Jeremy Vain** defeated **Frankie Valentine** by DQ ... **Bull Buchanan** pinned **Jimmy Rave** ... NWA champion **Colt Cabana** vs. **J-Rod** ended in a no-contest ... Colt Cabana & J-Rod defeated **Cru Jones & Shaun Banks**.
(03-19-11)

—Bill Behrens

VILLA RICA—Universal Independent Wrestling at Bay Springs Middle School: **Josh Storm** defeated **Kyle Matthews** ... **Doc Heyward** beat **Brad Lynch** ... Tag team champions **Billy Knight & Terry Lawler** defeated **Georgia Inmates (Spike & Hammer)** ... U.S. champion **Frankie Valentine** beat **Sal Rinauro** ... **X-Pac** pinned **Stupid** ...**Doug Somers & Bull Buchanan** vs. **Murder One & Rob Adonis** ended in a no-contest.
(03-12-11)

—Larry Goodman

CORNELIA—NWA Anarchy Wrestling at the NWA Arena: **Youth Gone Wild** defeated **Aaron Epic & Josh Rayne** ... **Mike Posey, Corey Hollis, & Chip Day** defeated **Jacob Ashworth, Lane Vasser, & Johnny Dangerous** ... **Andrew Alexander & Billy Buck** vs. **Hate Junkies** ended in a no-contest ... TV champion **Shaun Tempers** beat **Brody Chase** and **Seth Delay** in a three-way ... **Bo Newsome** pinned **CB Gibson** ... **Slim J** vs. **Azrael** ended in a no-contest ... Young Lion's champion **Aden Chambers** beat **Skirra Corvus** and **Jacob Ashworth** ... **Shadow Jackson & Ace Rockwell** defeated **Sev7n & Jay Fury**.
(03-12-11)

—Bill Behrens

ILLINOIS

CHICAGO—WWE Smackdown at Allstate Arena: **Kofi Kingston** beat **Wade Barrett** by DQ ... **Cody Rhodes** pinned **Chris Masters** ... **Edge, John Cena, Randy Orton, & Rey Mysterio Jr.** beat **Alberto Del Rio, CM Punk**, Cody Rhodes, & **The Miz**.
(04-01-11)

—Aaron Sloan

CHICAGO—WWE Raw at Allstate Arena: **Edge & Christian** beat **Alberto Del Rio & Brodus Clay** ... **Santino Marella** pinned **Justin Gabriel** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Jerry Lawler** by DQ ... **Sheamus & Dolph Ziggler** defeated **John Morrison & Daniel Bryan**.
(03-28-11)

—Aaron Sloan

BERWYN—SHIMMER Volume 40 at Eagles Club: **Kellie Skater** defeated **Taylor Made** ... **Rachel Summerlyn** defeated **Jessie Brooks** ... **Mercedes Martinez** beat **Christina Von Eerie** ... **MsChif** beat **Melanie Cruise** ... **Jessie McKay** defeated **Athena** ... **Britani & Saraya Knight** defeated **Allison Danger & Leva Bates** ... **Sara Del Ray** beat **Jessica James** ... **Serena** defeated **Cheerleader Melissa, LuFisto**, and **Portia Perez** in a four-corners survival match ... **Ayumi Kurihara** beat **Nicole Matthews** ... **Daizee Haze & Tomoka Nakagawa** defeated tag team champions **Hiroyo Matsumoto & Misaki Ohata** for the title ... Champion **Madison Eagles** beat **Hamada**.
(03-27-11)

—Dan Murphy

WOOD RIVER—Metro East Championship Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus Hall: Independent champion **Jimmy Rockwell** pinned **Jon West** ... **Shawn Santel** defeated **Devin Carter** ... **Chris Logan** beat **Evan Money & Buddy Roberts Jr.** in a handicap match ... **Mike Anthony & Sarin Sinn** defeated tag team champions **The Bowery Brawlers (Mad Dog McDowell & Mauler McDarby)** for the title ... **Eric Allen** beat Great Plains champion **Zach Thompson** and **Barry Ryte** in a triple-threat match for the title.
(03-26-11)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

CHAMPAIGN—WWE Raw at Assembly Hall: **Randy Orton** beat WWE champion **The Miz** by DQ ... **Santino Marella, Vladimir Kozlov, & Evan Bourne** beat **The Usos & Tyson Kidd** ... ... **The Great Khali** beat **Zack Ryder** ... **Sin Cara** beat Primo by submission ... **John Morrison** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Eve Torres & Natalya** defeated **Alicia Fox & Melina** ... U.S. champion **Sheamus** beat **Daniel Bryan** ... Randy Orton & **John Cena** defeated The Miz & **CM Punk**.
(03-25-11)

—Aaron Sloan

MOLINE—WWE Smackdown at the I Wireless Center: **Layla** beat **Kelly Kelly** ... **Percy Watson** defeated **Curt Hawkins** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Chris Masters** ... **Big Show & Kane** defeated tag team champions **Justin Gabriel & Heath Slater** by DQ ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Tyler Reks** ... Intercontinental champion **Kofi Kingston** beat **Cody Rhodes** and **Drew McIntyre** in a three-way ... **Edge & Christian** defeated **Alberto Del Rio & Brodus Clay**.
(03-13-11)

—Aaron Sloan

O'FALLON—St. Louis Anarchy/Anarchy Championship Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus Hall: **Dingo** pinned **El Partio** ... **The Smurf Nation (J.C. Bravo & Chingo)** beat **The Hooligans (Devin & Mason Cutter), Slim Sexy & Jordan Lacey**, and **The Halloween Crew (Black Rocker & Jack O. Lantern)** in a four-way ... **Franco D'Angelo** defeated **Mat Fitchett** ... ACW Joshi champion **Lady Poison** beat **Athena** ... **Shorty Biggs & Billy McNeil** defeated **The Children of Pain (Khris Wolfe & Sky DeLacrimosa)** ... **Shawn Vexx** beat **Darin Childs** ... ACW heavyweight champion **Matthew Palmer** pinned **Davey Vega** ... ACW Women's tag team champions **Rachel & Jessica's Excellent Tag Team (Rachel Summerlyn & Jessica James)** beat **Portia Perez & Super Electro** and **MsChif & Daizee Haze** in a three-way ... **J.T. LaMotta** beat **Delirious** ... **Dan Walsh, A.C.H., Scot Summers, & Mat Fitchett** defeated **Evan Gelistico, Pierre Abernathy, Dingo, & Gerald James** .
(03-12-11)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

INDIANA

EVANSVILLE—WWE Raw at Roberts Stadium: **Randy Orton** beat WWE champion **The Miz** by DQ ... **Santino Marella, Vladimir Kozlov, & Evan Bourne** beat **The Usos & Tyson Kidd** ... ... **The Great Khali** pinned **Zack Ryder** ... **Sin Cara** beat Primo by submission ... **John Morrison** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Eve Torres**

& **Natalya** defeated **Alicia Fox** & **Melina** ... U.S. champion **Sheamus** pinned **Daniel Bryan** ... Randy Orton & **John Cena** defeated The Miz & **CM Punk**.
(03-26-11)

—Roger Dudley

IOWA

CEDAR RAPIDS—WWE Smackdown at the U.S. Cellular Center: **Layla** beat **Kelly Kelly** ... **Percy Watson** defeated **Curt Hawkins** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Chris Masters** ... **Big Show** & **Kane** defeated tag team champions **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** by DQ ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Tyler Reks** ... **Edge** & **Christian** defeated **Alberto Del Rio** & **Brodus Clay**.
(03-12-11)

—Peter Bogert

KANSAS

WICHITA—WWE Raw at Intrust Bank Arena: **Sheamus** won a 14-man battle royal, last eliminating **Mark Henry** ... Divas champion **Eve Torres** pinned **Nikki Bella** ... **R-Truth** beat **William Regal** ... **Evan Bourne** pinned **Tyson Kidd** ... **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** beat **Jimmy** & **Jey Uso** ... U.S. champion **Daniel Bryan** pinned Sheamus ... **John Cena** & **Randy Orton** beat **The Miz** & **Alex Riley**.
(03-12-11)

—Terry Rongstead

LOUISIANA

ALEXANDRIA—WWE Raw at the Rapides Parish Coliseum: **R-Truth** beat **Zack Ryder** ... **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** beat **Jimmy** & **Jey Uso** ... **The Great Khali** defeated **William Regal** ... U.S. champion **Daniel Bryan** beat **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **Evan Bourne** pinned **Sheamus** ... **John Morrison** pinned **Alex Riley** ... Divas champion **Eve Torres** defeated **Brie Bella** ... WWE champion **The Miz** beat **John Cena** and **CM Punk** in a three-way.
(03-05-11)

—Bernie Friel

MARYLAND

DUNDALK—Maryland Championship Wrestling at the New Green Room: **Kirby Mack** pinned **Aden Chambers** ... **Nui Tofiga** defeated **Alexander James** ... **Sami Callihan** beat **Rich Swann** by submission ... **Josh Daniels** defeated **Kindred** ... **Da Nu Bloods** beat **The Hellcats** ... Rage TV champion **Cobian** beat **Zachary Shane** ... **Drolix** defeated **James Anthony** ... **Fed Up** & **J.P. Callahan** beat **The Holy Rollers** & **Ronnie Zukko** ... MCW heavyweight champion **Tyler Hilton** vs. **Ryan McBride** ended in a no-contest.
(03-19-11)

—Tim Walker

MASSACUSETTS

CHICOPEE—Big Time Wrestling at the Boys & Girls Club: **Flex Armstrong** defeated **Bishop Antoine Roi** ... TV champion **A.J. Mitrano** defeated **Rush** ... Tag team champions **Danny Miles** & **Scott Reed** defeated **Uncle Sonny** & **Cousin Larry** ... **Playboy Jimmy James** beat **Bobby Ocean** and **Todo Loco** in a three-way ... **Diamondback Jack Maverick** defeated **Mr. T.A.** in a streetfight ... **Shane Douglas** & **Tony Delfonzo** vs. **Tommy Dreamer** & **Eddie Delfonzo** ended in a no-contest.
(03-26-11)

—Shawn O'Domski

LOWELL—Chaotic Wrestling at Polish American Veterans Club: **Mikaze** pinned **Kongo** ... **Brian Fury** beat **Psycho** by submission ... Tag team champions **Matt** & **Bryan Logan** vs. **Chase Del Monte** & **Elia Markopoulos** ended in a draw ... New England champion **Max Bauer** pinned **Tommaso Ciampa** ... **Brandon Locke** pinned **East Coast Cowboy** ... **Mercedes KV** pinned **Mistress Belmont** ... Heavyweight champion **Brian Milonas** pinned **Handsome Johnny**.
(03-25-11)

—Dave Ratty

MELROSE—Millenium Wrestling Federation at Memorial Hall: TV champion **Brian Fury** pinned **Sonny Yi 2000** ... **Rick Fuller** & **Brian Milonas** won a Royal Rumble match to win the tag team title ... **Low Ki** pinned **Jay Freddie** ... **X-Pac** pinned **Scott Reed** ... **Todd Hanson** pinned **Doink** ... **Dylan Kage** pinned **Demon Ortiz** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned heavyweight champion **Slyck Wagner Brown** for the title.
(03-19-11)

—Dave Ratty

PLYMOUTH—Ring Of Honor at Memorial Hall: **Mark Briscoe** pinned **Kyle O'Reilly** ... **Kenny King** & **Rhett Titus** beat **Steve Corino** & **Grizzly Redwood** ... **Tommaso Ciampa** pinned **Adam Cole** ... **Chris Hero** pinned **TJ Perkins** ... **Lance** & **Harlem Bravado** beat **Matt Taven** & **Guy Alexander** ... **Eddie Edwards** pinned **Michael Elgin** ... TV champion **Christopher Daniels** pinned **Mike Bennett** ... **Davey Richards** pinned **Claudio Castagnoli** ... **Roderick Strong** beat **El Generico**, **Jay Briscoe**, and **Homicide** in a four-way elimination match.
(03-18-11)

—Dave Ratty

MICHIGAN

EAST LANSING—WWE Smackdown at the Breslin Student Events Center: **Kofi Kingston** won an 11-man battle royal ... **Layla** & **Kaitlyn** defeated **Beth Phoenix** & **AJ Lee** ... **Christian** beat **Brodus Clay** ... Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** defeated Kofi Kingston ... **Edge** & **Rey Mysterio Jr.** defeated **Alberto Del Rio** & **Cody Rhodes**.
(03-27-11)

—Ron Taylor

MINNESOTA

BEMIDJI—TNA at the Sanford Center: **Ink Inc.** (**Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) beat **Gunner** & **Murphy** ... Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** defeated **Angelina Love** ... **Brother Devon** beat **Hernandez** ... **Mr. Anderson** defeated **Bully Ray** ... **Samoa Joe** defeated **D'Angelo Dinero** ... **Kurt Angle** beat **Jeff Jarrett**.
(03-24-11)

—Amy Longstead

MISSISSIPPI

McADAMS—Total Wrestling Explosion at the TWE Arena: **Mikey Goodyear** vs. **The Giant Hillbilly** ended in a no-contest ... Mikey Goodyear & **David Cox** beat The Giant Hillbilly in a handicap match ... **Logan Creed** defeated **Mark Orton** ... **White N Nerrdy** beat **Nathan Aulridge** ... **The Atomic Kid** & **Sweet Daddy Jones** defeated **The Southern Outlaws** (**Jon Evans** & **Rick Morgan**).
(03-12-11)

—Daphne Bowen

MISSOURI

KANSAS CITY—WWE Smackdown at the Sprint Center: **Edge** pinned **Brodus Clay** ... U.S. champion **Sheamus** pinned Intercontinental champion **Kofi Kingston** in a non-title match ... **Cody Rhodes** beat **Trent Baretta** ... **Layla** pinned **Kelly Kelly** ... **Big Show** & **Kane** defeated tag team champions **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** by DQ ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Chris Masters** by submission ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** pinned **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **Christian** defeated **Alberto Del Rio** in a cage match.
(03-18-11)

—Brad Evans

ST. LOUIS—WWE Raw at the Scottrade Center: **The Great Khali** beat **The Miz** by DQ ... **Sheamus** pinned U.S. champion **Daniel Bryan** for the title ... **Randy Orton** pinned **Mason Ryan** ... **Vickie Guerrero** pinned **Trish Stratus** in a no-DQ match ... **John Cena** beat **Alberto Del Rio** by DQ.
(03-14-11)

—Brad Evans

Max Buck launches brother Jeremy over the ropes and onto X division champ Kazarian and Robbie E during this thrilling four-way Ultimate X match. Kazarian proved superior in the end, kicking Robbie off the ladder and grabbing his belt. The Bucks walked away empty-handed and with some heat between them.

RICHMOND—World League Wrestling at the Community Center: **Jason Jones** defeated **Cancun Kid** ... **Jeff Strong** defeated **Mark Sterling** ... **Ryan Drago** beat **Steve Fender** ... **Stacey O'Brien** beat **Lucy Mendez** ... Tag team champions **Ethan Wright** & Cancun Kid defeated Jason Jones & **Jack Gamble**.
(03-12-11)

—Brian Kelley

SPRINGFIELD—WWE Raw at the JQH Arena: **Sheamus** won a 14-man battle royal, last eliminating **Mark Henry** ... Divas champion **Eve Torres** pinned **Nikki Bella** ... **R-Truth** & **Mark Henry** beat **Tyson Kidd** & **William Regal** ... **Evan Bourne** pinned **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **Alex Riley** pinned **Yoshi Tatsu** ... **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** beat **Jimmy** & **Jey Uso** ... U.S. champion **Daniel Bryan** pinned Sheamus ... WWE champion **The Miz** beat **John Cena** and **CM Punk** in a three-way.
(03-11-11)

—Brad Evans

NEW JERSEY

WOODLAND PARK—IWF at the IWC Centre: **Damian Adams** defeated **Latin Lover Chachi** ...American champion **Flex Freeman** defeated **Aaron Stride** ... **Chris Steeler** defeated **Kevin Knight** ... **Marc Corino** won an eight-man battle royal, last eliminating **Larry Lawson** ... Heavyweight champion **The Mastodon Franciz** defeated **Dangerous Danny E.**
(03-26-11)

—Shannon Rose

NEWARK—WWE Raw at the Prudential Center: **John Morrison** defeated **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** beat **Zack Ryder** & **Primo** ... **The Great Khali** pinned Zack Ryder ... **Daniel Bryan** beat **Tyson Kidd** ... **Evan Bourne** beat **Dolph Ziggler** by DQ ...WWE champion **The Miz** defeated **Randy Orton** in a cage match ... **Eve Torres**, **Gail Kim**, & **Kelly Kelly** defeated **The Bellas** & **Maryse** ... **Triple-H** & **John Cena** beat **CM Punk** & **Sheamus**.
(03-20-11)

—George Tahinos

BELLMAWR—Old Time Wrestling at Old Time Wrestling Entertainment Arena: **Adam Chandler** defeated **The Masked Man** ... **Chris Bohren** pinned **Andy Bivians** ... **John Graber** defeated **Mike Rugenus** & **Jake Reyes** in a handicap match ... **Bazooka Joe** beat **George Zlotnicki** ... Adam Chandler, Chris Bohren, & John Graber defeated George Zlotnicki, Jake Reyes, & Mike Rugenus ... **I.M. Smarter**, **Craig Nash**, & Andy Bivians defeated **Brolly**, **Eddie Hawkins**, & **Anthony Haynes**.
(03-19-11)

—Brian Johnson

VOORHEES—Tri-State Wrestling Alliance at the Flyers Skate Zone: **Blue Meanie** & **Kid America** vs. **The Russian Assassins** ended in a double-countout ... **Sensei** defeated **Mr. Ooh La La** by DQ ... **Joshua Daniels** defeated **Chris Wylde** by submission ... **Brittany Force** beat **Kacee Carlisle** ... **Bobby Shields** beat **Tony Stetson** ... Tag team champions **Damian Dragon** & **Matt Saigon** defeated **Joe Gacy** & **Ryan Slater** ... Heavyweight champion **Breaker Morant** beat **Judas Young** and **CUJO the Hellhound** in a triple-threat match.
(03-05-11)

—Joe Zanolle

NEW YORK

BURNT HILLS—Northeast Wrestling at Burnt Hills Ballston Lake High School: **Cedric Alexander** defeated **Bull Dredd** ... **Adam Cole** beat **Ryan McBride** ... **The NOW** (**Vik Dalishus** & **Hale Collins**) defeated **Caleb Konley** & **Brian Anthony** ... Heavyweight champion **Matt Taven** beat **Mike Bennett** ... **Hacksaw Jim Duggan** pinned **Jake Manning** ... **Jeff Starr** pinned **Violence** in a no-DQ match.
(03-25-11)

—Tim Walker

WOODSIDE—NYWC at St. Sebastian's Parish Center: **K-Murda** defeated **Marty Flames** ... **Dickie Rodz** & **Stockade** beat **Royally Phat** (**MC Kenny Royal** & **DJ Pat**) ... Tag team champions **Big Time Rush** (**Tony Burma** & **Ryan Rush**) defeated **The Uninvited** (**Manny Martinez** & **Spyder**) ... **Apollyon** defeated **J.T. Kasin** ... **Mikey Whipwreck** & **Syther** beat **Chris Forza** & **Tony Nese** ... **King Mega** & **Alex Reynolds** defeated **Tandemonium** (**Odie Montez** & **Matias**) ... **Dimitrios Papadon** beat **Victor Cruz** ... **Francis Kipland Steven III** & **Violet** defeated **Rex Lawless** & **Nickie** ... **Pat Buck** beat **Mike Mondo** ... **John Silver** & **Jim Duggan** defeated **The Celtic Saints** (**Michael** & **Kieran Mansfield**).
(03-20-11)

—Ken Lippe

NEW YORK—WWE Raw at Madison Square Garden: **Randy Orton** beat WWE champion **The Miz** by DQ ... **Santino Marella**, **Vladimir Kozlov**, & **Evan Bourne** beat **Zack Ryder**, **Primo**, & **Tyson Kidd** ... **The Great Khali** pinned **Alex Riley** ... **Kelly Kelly** & **Eve Torres** defeated **Brie** & **Nikki Bella** ... **John Morrison** pinned **Dolph Ziggler** ... **Daniel Bryan** beat **Ted DiBiase Jr.** by submission ... **Triple-H** pinned U.S. champion **Sheamus** in a non-title streetfight ... Randy Orton & **John Cena** defeated The Miz & **CM Punk**.
(03-19-11)

—George Napolitano

NEW YORK—Ring of Honor at the Manhattan Center: **Adam Cole** & **Kyle O'Reily** beat **Michael Elgin** & **Mike Mondo** ... **Tomasso Ciampa** pinned **Grizzly Redwood** ... **Mike Bennett** pinned **Steve Corino** ... **The All Night Express** (**Rhett Titus** & **Kenny King**) beat **Jay** & **Mark Briscoe** ... **El Generico** pinned **TJ Perkins** ... **The Kings of Wrestling** (**Chris Hero** & **Claudio Castagnoli**) defeated **LAX** (**Hernandez** & **Homicide**) ... **Davey Richards** pinned **Christopher Daniels** ... **Eddie Edwards** pinned heavyweight champion **Roderick Strong** for the title.
(03-19-11)

—Al Castle

MT. SINAI—NYWC at Mt. Sinai High School: **Tandemonium** (**Odie Montez** & **Matias**) defeated **Mikey Whipwreck** & **Syther** ... **Francis Kipland Stevens III** defeated **Manny Martinez** ... **Pat Buck** &

Beer Money Inc. has been picking up momentum in recent months and had been jostling with Ring of Honor's Kings of Wrestling for the top spot in our ratings for a while. Ink Inc. provided a tough challenge at Victory Road, but in the end, Robert Roode (flattening Jesse Neal) and James Storm prevailed.

Jay Johnson beat **Royally Phat** (**DJ Pat** & **MC Kenny Royal**) ... **Robert Franklin** defeated **Marty Flames** ... **Kieran Mansfield** beat **Mike Mondo** ... **Rex Lawless** & **Dickie Rodz** defeated **The Uninvited** (**Spyder** & **Victor Cruz**) ... **Brittany Savage** defeated **Violet** ... **Dimitrios Papadon**, **John Silver**, & **J.T. Kasin** beat **Apollyon**, **Stockade**, & **Chris Forza** ... **Tony Burma** defeated **King Mega** by DQ ... Heavyweight champion **Ryan Rush** defeated **Alex Reynolds** and **Tony Nese** in a three-way.
(03-18-11)

—Ken Lippe

NORTH CAROLINA

THOMASVILLE—AIWF Mid-Atlantic Wrestling at Thomasville High School: **Caleb Christian** beat **Ric Kelly** ... **Joe Kidd** pinned **Tony Lane** ... Mid-Atlantic champion **Louis Moore** defeated **Ouga Booga** ... **Matt Smith** beat **Shawn Cruise** ... **Paco Loco** & **Rob McBride** beat Mid-Atlantic tag team champions **Notorious** for the title ... Heavyweight champion **Ricky Morton** pinned **Jimi Love**.
(03-26-11)

—Henry Dean

FAYETTEVILLE—RWC at John D. Fuller Recreation/Athletic Complex: **Petey Bangz** defeated **PoPo Da Klown** ... **Guerro Ninja** won a St. Patrick's Day battle royal ... **BD Productions** defeated **Dark Arrival** ... Youtube champion **Diego Vasquez** beat **Mark Blade** ... **C.W. Anderson** beat **Hangtyme** by submission ... Heavyweight champion **Ash Walker** defeated **Cham-Pain**.
(03-19-11)

—Matthew McCoy

FOREST CITY—Southern Wrestling Association Rhymer Cup Tag Team Tournament at the National Guard Armory: **Team Ego** (**Will Snapp** & **Abel Adams**) defeated **Derrick Driver** & **John Skyler** ... **PG-13** (**Joey Rhymer** & **Will Demented**) defeated **Supremacy** (**Derek Ryze** & **Mike McCloud**) by DQ ... **East Coast Avengers** (**Neil Nitro** & **Brice Anthony**) vs. **Attention Deficit Disorder** (**Manchild** & **Jamie Lee**) vs. **Law** & **Tattoo** ended in a no-contest ... **Shea Shea McGrady** & **Rob Killjoy** defeated **Dark Illusions** (**Kid Chaos** & **Wicked**) ... **B.O.D.** (**Thug** & **Erik Anton**) defeated **Chris Hamrick** & **Ric Hart** ... B.O.D. defeated Team Ego by countout ... Rob Killjoy & Shea Shea McGrady defeated PG-13 ... Tag team champions Rob Killjoy & Shea Shea McGrady defeated B.O.D. for the title ... **Myric Moore** defeated **Stumpy Grimmitt** by submission ... **B.J. Hancock** pinned Rob Killjoy.
(03-19-11)

—Brett Wolverton

HENDERSONVILLE—High Velocity Wrestling at the HVW Arena ... **Steven Walters** pinned **Myric Moore** ... **Rob Wright** pinned **Cyanide** ... **Ben Wright** defeated **Tom Williams**, **Brett Martel**, **Ethan Case**, and **T-Roy Jones** in a scramble match ... **T.J. Boss** pinned **Elite** ... **The Destruction Crew** (**Tank Hurley** & **Bulldozer**) defeated tag team champions **LOL** (**Dylan Dollar** & **Will Balderas**) and **Attention Deficit Disorder** (**Manchild** & **Jamie Lee**) in a triple-threat for the title ... **Alex Avgerinos** pinned Southeastern champion **Scott Pitt** for the title ... Ben Wright pinned Southeastern champion Alex Avgerinos for the title ... **Viper** defeated heavyweight champion Jason Banks by DQ.
(03-12-11)

—Brett Wolverton

After putting up with Ric Flair's continual nonsense AJ's Pele Kick must have felt awfully good for the former TNA champion. Better yet, after Styles scored the pinfall victory against Matt Hardy, he dropped a complaining Flair with a move he's quite fond of—a low blow from behind.

FAYETTEVILLE—TNA at the Cumberland County Crown Coliseum: **D'Angelo Dinero** pinned **Samoa Joe** ... Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** pinned **Roxxi** ... **Angelina Love**, **Velvet Sky**, & **Winter** beat **Sarita**, **Cookie**, & **Angelina** ... **Ric Flair** beat **AJ Styles** and **Matt Hardy** in a streetfight ... **Ink Inc.** (**Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) beat **Generation Me** (**Max** & **Jeremy Buck**) ... **Sting** & **Rob Van Dam** defeated **Jeff Hardy** & **Mr. Anderson**.
(03-10-11)

—Gary Shapiro

NORTH DAKOTA

GRAND FORKS—TNA at the Alerus Center: **Ink Inc.** (**Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) beat **Gunner** & **Murphy** ... Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** defeated **Angelina Love** ... **Brother Devon** beat **Hernandez** ... **Mr. Anderson** defeated **Bully Ray** ... **Samoa Joe** defeated **D'Angelo Dinero** ... **Kurt Angle** beat **Jeff Jarrett**.
(03-25-11)

—Coleman Wares

FARGO—TNA at the Fargo Civic Center: **Ink Inc.** (**Jesse Neal** & **Shannon Moore**) beat **Gunner** & **Murphy** ... Knockouts champion **Madison Rayne** defeated **Angelina Love** ... **Brother Devon** beat **Hernandez** ... **Mr. Anderson** defeated **Bully Ray** ... **Samoa Joe** defeated **D'Angelo Dinero** ... **Kurt Angle** beat **Jeff Jarrett**.
(03-24-11)

—Coleman Wares

COLUMBUS—WWE Smackdown at the Nationwide Arena: **Rey Mysterio Jr.** beat **CM Punk** by DQ ... World champion **Edge** defeated **Drew McIntyre** by DQ in a non-title match ... **Michelle McCool** & **Layla** defeated **Kelly Kelly** & **Rosa Mendes** ... **Wade Barrett** pinned Intercontinental champion **Kofi Kingston** for the title ... **Jack Swagger** beat **R-Truth** by submission ... **Christian** pinned **Alberto Del Rio**.
(03-25-11)

—Seth Morgan

OHIO

BARBERTON—Real Action Wrestling at Shamrock Nite Club: **Marcus Knight** beat **Hombre De La Noches** ... Heritage champion **Trystan Tyler** beat **Bobbinette Carey** ... **Angel Camacho** defeated **Jamie Starr** by DQ ... **Axel**, **Stevie Edwards**, & **Angel Dust** defeated **Shawn Blaze**, **The Bouncer**, & **Flea** in a streetfight ... Heavyweight champion **Aftermath** beat **Seth Allen**.
(03-29-11)

—Johnny James

CLINTON—Mid Ohio Wrestling at Highpoint Christian Church: **Kenny Hendrix** & **Kid Collins** beat **Benjamin Bartholomew** & **Vladik Vornoff** ... Tri-County champion **Ryan Burke** vs. **Gregory Iron** ended in a

Number-one contender's matches don't solve much if they do not have a winner. But a match between Rob Van Dam and Mr. Anderson can't help but be entertainment, even if it ends in a double-countout.

draw ... **Jake South** beat **Jimmie Lee** ... Cruiserweight champion **JJ DeVille** defeated **Izzy Lambert** ... Tag team champions **Mr. Main Event** & **Moondog Scrap** beat **The Bouncer** & **Axel** by DQ ... **Tommy Chill** beat **Cyrus Poe** in a bullrope match.
(03-26-11)

—Johnny James

CINCINNATI—Bizarro Live at the Eastgate Holiday Inn: **Trip Cassidy** vs. **Tom Harbin** ended in a no-contest ... **Jake Omen** & **GeeGee** defeated **The Spaghetti Connection** ... **Azul la Flor** pinned **Dizzy D** ... **El Manos** pinned **The Flying Redneck** ... **El Chupacabra** pinned **Brutal Bellman** ... **American Kickboxer II** pinned **Sugoi Tora**.
(03-18-11)

—Jeremiah Young

BARBERTON—Real Action Wrestling at Shamrock Nite Club: **Scott Prodigy** beat **Hombre de la Noches** ... **Trystan Tyler** & **Vinny DiMarzo** beat **Flea** & **Bobbinette Carey** ... **The Bouncer** & **Marcus Knight** defeated **Stevie Edwards**, **Angel Camacho**, & **Jamie Starr** in a handicap match ... Heavyweight champion **Aftermath** defeated **Josh Emanuel** ... **Angel Dust** beat **Shawn Blaze**.
(03-15-11)

—Johnny James

TOLDEDO—Universal All Pro Wrestling at the Glass City Wrestling Academy: **Brent Daniels** defeated **Trey Miguel**, **Ryan Peerson**, **Donnie Dude**, and **Joe Rodriguez** in a five-man elimination match ... **Alvis Nutcase** defeated **Johnny Binion** ... **Dick Nasty** beat **Michael Zane** ... **Rampage** & **Trey Miguel** beat **Ice Tre** & **Brent Daniels** by DQ ... Joe Rodriguez beat Ryan Peerson and Donnie Dude in a three-way ... **Carnage** & **Jake Frost** defeated **Eli McFly** & **Criss Chambers** ... **Kamala Jr.** defeated **Dr. K. Fabian** ... **Mr. Main Event** defeated **Rob Vance**.
(03-12-11)

—Jeff Smith

ASHTABULA—Magnum Pro Wrestling at Mother of Sorrows Gym: **Marcus Knight** beat **The Dark Assassian** ... **Luis Diamante** vs. **Shawn Blaze** ended in a no-contest ... **Scott Prodigy** & **Drew Forge** defeated **The Forsaken**, **Moondog Scrap**, & **Andre Kannon Alexander** in a three-way tag match ... **Angel Dust** defeated **Alexis Moore** ... **Mr. R.B.I.** beat **Lamont Williams** ... Tri-County champion **The Bouncer** defeated **The Kombat Kid** ... **Axel** beat **J-Rocc** ... **Seth Allen**, Shawn Blaze, & **Aftermath** defeated Luis Diamante & **Brandon X** in a handicap match.
(03-12-11)

—Johnny James

OKLAHOMA

OKLAHOMA CITY—WWE Raw at the Oklahoma City Arena: **Mark Henry** & **R-Truth** beat **Tyson Kidd** & **William Regal** ... **Sheamus** pinned **Yoshi Tatsu** ... **John Morrison** pinned **Alex Riley** ... **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** beat **Jimmy** & **Jey Uso** ... WWE champion **The Miz** pinned **Randy Orton** ... **The Bella Twins** & **Maryse** beat **Eve Torres**, **Gail Kim**, & **Tamina** ... U.S. champion **Daniel Bryan** beat **Evan Bourne** and **Ted DiBiase Jr.** in a three-way ... **John Cena** pinned **CM Punk**.
(03-13-11)

—C.J. O'Reilly

PENNSYLVANIA

PITTSBURGH—KSWA at the Lawrenceville Moose: **Jay Flash**, **Tony Johnson**, **Kris Kash**, & **Shane Starr** defeated **The Jester**, **Del Douglas**, **JP Goulet**, & **Drew Belanger** ... **Shawn Blanchard** defeated **Justin Sane** ... **Mitch Napier** defeated **Lou Martin** ... **The Blood Beast** beat **Biker Al** & **The Great Toyota** in a handicap match ... Mitch Napier beat Shawn Blanchard ... **Anthony Alexander** defeated **Alex Arcadian**, **Vinnie Stone**, and **Bobby Badfingers** in a fatal four-way match ... **Ali Kaida** defeated **The Latin Assassin** in a streetfight.
(03-26-11)

—Marty Lyons

PITTSBURGH—WWE Raw at the CONSOL Energy Center: U.S. champion **Sheamus** pinned **Evan Bourne** ... Divas champion **Eve Torres** pinned **Maryse** ... WWE tag champions **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** beat **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** ... **Layla**, **Michelle McCool**, **Vickie Guerrero**, & **Dolph Ziggler** beat **John Morrison** & **Trish Stratus** in a handicap match ... **Randy Orton** vs. **Rey Mysterio Jr.** ended in a no-contest.
(03-21-11)

—Gil Nevada

SOUTH CAROLINA

HANAHAN—Old School Championship Wrestling at the Hanahan Recreation Center ... Intercontinental champion **Hexxon** pinned **Jake Manning** ... Tag team champions **Sixx** & **Nick Kismet** defeated **Jack Hammer** & **Brandon Paradise** ... **Asylum** pinned heavyweight champion **Big Hoss** for the title ... **Killian O'Conn** pinned **Major DeBeers** in a career-vs.-career steel cage match ... **Bob Keller**, **Josh Magnum**, **Jesse Windham**, **Jon Malus**, & **Cedric Alexander** defeated **John Skyler**, **B.J. Hancock**, **Caleb Konley**, **Ken Magnum**, & **Big Game James** in a War Games match when Hancock surrendered ... **Sgt. Solitude** pinned Universal champion **Hans Baumgartner** in a dog collar steel cage match for the title ... Hardcore champion **Cali Casanova** defeated **Raven** and **Lodi** in a triple-threat.
(03-13-11)

—Brett Wolverton

TENNESSEE

MILLERSVILLE—Southern All-Star Wrestling at SAW Mill: **The Wildboys** defeated **Lee Cross** & **LBK** ... **Cody Weatherby** beat **Anthony Wayne** and **Dave Adkins** in a three-way ... **Hammerjack** vs. **Arrick Andrews** ended in a no-contest ... **Shane Eden** defeated **David Matthews** ... **Ox Harley** beat **Derrick Neal**.
(03-25-11)

—Lekisha F. Oliver

NASHVILLE—NWA Main Event at the NWA Arena: **Jamey Farrari** defeated **Chris Eckos** ... **Shawn Shultz** beat **Bryan Casey** ... **Psycho Medic** beat **Ox Harley** by DQ ... **Damien Payne** & **Kaige Kuttler** defeated **Super Barney**, **Kirk Patrick**, and **Sebastian Stardust** ... **Kevin Dunn** defeated **Derek Neal** ... **Will Owens** beat **Steve O**.
(03-10-11)

—Lekisha F. Oliver

TEXAS

TEXAS CITY—Coastal Wrestling Federation at the Coastal Arena: **Phoenix** pinned **Extreme** ... **Andromeda** & **Darci Drake** defeated **San Antonio's Most Unwanted** (**Reyna Pink** & **Joey Spector**) ... Gulf Coast champion **Lance Beretta** beat **Major Eddie Lee** ... **The Texas Hitmen** (**Big Dogg** & **Skitzo**) defeated **The Karate Kids** (**JoJo Bravo** & **Black Belt Jones**) ... Heavyweight champion **Nate Law** pinned **Slam Shady** ... **Jon Heidenrich** beat **Ray Rowe**.
(03-26-11)

—William L. Hamilton

HOUSTON—WWE Smackdown at the Toyota Center: **Kane** vs. **Wade Barrett** ended in a no-contest ... Kane & **Big Show** defeated Wade Barrett & **Heath Slater** by DQ ... **Cody Rhodes** defeated **JTG** ... **Layla** beat **Kaitlyn** ... **Rey Mysterio Jr.** vs. **Drew McIntyre** ended in a draw ... **Edge** & **Christian** defeated **Alberto Del Rio** & **Brodus Clay**.
(03-10-11)

—Steve Beyers

DALLAS—WWE Raw at the American Airlines Arena: **Randy Orton** pinned **David Otunga** ... **Christian** pinned **Brodus Clay** ... Divas champion **Eve Torres** pinned **Nikki Bella** ... U.S. champion **Bryan Daniel** beat **Sheamus** by coutout ... **CM Punk** beat **R-Truth** by submission ... **Dolph Ziggler** pinned **John Morrison**.
(03-07-11)

—Steve Beyers

COLLEGE STATION—WWE Raw at Reed Arena: **Truth** beat **Zack Ryder** ... **Santino Marella** & **Vladimir Kozlov** beat **Jimmy** & **Jey Uso** ... **The Great Khali** pinned **William Regal** ... U.S. champion **Daniel Bryan** pinned **Ted DiBiase Jr.** ... **Evan Bourne** pinned **Sheamus** ... **John Morrison** pinned **Alex Riley** ... Divas champion **Eve Torres** defeated **Brie Bella** ... WWE champion **The Miz** beat **John Cena** and **CM Punk** in a three-way.
(03-06-11)

—Steve Beyers

WACO—WWE Smackdown at the Extraco Events Center: **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Tyler Reks** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Chris Masters** ... **Percy Watson** beat **Curt Hawkins** ... **Kane** & **Christian** beat WWE tag champions **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** by DQ ... Intercontinental champion **Kofi Kingston** defeated **Drew McIntyre** ... **Beth Phoenix** & **Rosa Mendes** beat **Layla** & **Kaitlyn** ... **Edge** & **Rey Mysterio Jr.** defeated **Alberto Del Rio** & **Cody Rhodes**.
(03-06-11)

—Steve Beyers

VIRGINIA

FREDERICKSBURG—Southside Pro Wrestling at American Indoor Karting: **Beauregard Crockett** vs. **Big Boy Cross** ended in a no-contest ... **Monster Mike** vs. **Tremmor** ended in a double-countout ... **Sterling Williams** defeated **Carl Madoff Jr.** ... **Carlos Hotness** beat **S12** ... **Veterans Administration** (**Ray Storm** & **Phil Brown**) beat **The Wild Americans** (**Bryan Andrews** & **Johnny Liberty** ... Heavyweight champion **Ryan Nuzzi** pinned **Curtis Mack**.
(03-27-11)

—Wesley Smith Jr.

ROANOKE—WWE Smackdown at the Roanoke Civic Center: **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Tyler Reks** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Chris Masters** ... **Percy Watson** beat **Curt Hawkins** ... **Kane** & **Christian** beat WWE tag champions **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** by DQ ... Intercontinental champion **Kofi Kingston** defeated **Drew McIntyre** ... **Beth Phoenix** defeated **Layla** ... **Big Show** beat **Wade Barrett** ...World champion **Edge** beat **Alberto Del Rio** and **Cody Rhodes** in a triple-threat.
(03-19-11)

—Ben Malavi

VIRGINIA BEACH—Southside Pro Wrestling at SPW Studios: **Sam Bass** defeated **Tremmor** ... **Nate Mustang** beat **Carlos Hotness** ... **Sterling Williams** pinned **Curtis Mack** ... Sterling Williams beat Nate Mustang ... **The Veterans Administration (Ray Storm** & **Phil Brown)** defeated **The Wild Americans** (**Bryan Andrews** & **Johnny Liberty**) ... **Ryan Nuzzi** beat **Carl Madoff Jr**. by submission ... **S-12** beat Phil Brown by DQ ... Sam Bass beat Carl Madolf Jr. ... Curtis Mack pinned Tremmor.
(03-19-11)

—Wesley Smith Jr.

PRINCE GEORGE—Ground Xero Wrestling at Prince George High School: **Kacee Carlisle** defeated **Brittany Force** ... New Heritage champion **Pete Spade** won a 20-man, two-ring, over-the-top battle royal ... **The Patriot** defeated **Shorty Smalls** ... **The Drago Dynasty** defeated **Holy Union** and **Standards and Practices** in a three-way TLC match ... **Mitchapalooza** beat heavyweight champion **Phil Brown** for the title ... **Dave Cullen** defeated **Martin Stanley Fuqua** for GXW ownership.
(03-12-11)

—Shorty Smalls

WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON—WWE Smackdown at the Charleston Civic Center: **Layla** beat **Beth Phoenix** ... **Percy Watson** defeated **Curt Hawkins** ... **Jack Swagger** beat **Chris Masters** ... **Big Show** & **Kane** defeated tag team champions **Justin Gabriel** & **Heath Slater** by DQ ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Tyler Reks** ... Intercontinental champion **Kofi Kingston** beat **Cody Rhodes** and **Drew McIntyre** in a three-way ... **Edge** & **Christian** defeated **Alberto Del Rio** & **Brodus Clay**.
(03-20-11)

—Hal Reniff

Ah, the main event! Sting vs. Jeff Hardy for the TNA World title! Ugh!

KEYSER—Elite Pro Wrestling Alliance at the Keyser National Guard Armory: **Scott Titus** pinned **Terry Ring** ... **OGB** beat **Chris Cline** by DQ ... **Griffen** & **Sinister Cross** defeated **Kris Kordell** & **Mojo the Spidermonkey** ... **Sonjay Dutt** beat **Robbie Paige** and **Joseph Brooks** in a triple-threat for the vacant Elite Pro cruiserweight title ... **Flex Fenom** vs. **Leslie Leatherman** ended in a double-countout ... **Kacee Carlisle** pinned **Brittany Force** ... **Samu** beat **The Barbarian** ... Elite Pro heavyweight champion **Vince Vega** defeated **Bodie Williams**.
(03-18-11)

—Tim Walker

HUNTINGTON—304 Wrestling at Veterans Memorial Field House: **Bulldozer** pinned **Chris Cannon** ... **Shane Matthews** pinned **Allen Lynch** ... **Loco Da Clown** defeated **Eric Steele** in a no-holds-barred match ... **Jaz-E** & **Blazin' Eagle** defeated **The Iraqi Resistance** ... **Chris Carnage** beat **Damien Matthews** ... **Ryan Edmonds** defeated **Jock Sampson** ... **Sean Casey** pinned **Ricky Morton** ... Women's champion **Jessie Bell Smothers** defeated **Mickie Knuckles** ... Heavyweight champion **Onyx** pinned **Brian Masters**.
(03-13-11)

—Ryan Prichard

MOUNDSVILLE—Black Diamond Wrestling at Moundsville Eagles: **Diamond Dave** beat **Chest Flexor** ... **Vinnie Stone** beat **Keith Haught** ... Tag team champions **The Bouncer** & **Rock Lobster** defeated **The Insurgentz** ... **The Great Panzram** beat **Sawashbuckler Benjamin** ... **Sean Dahmer** beat **Appollyon** ... **Dan Sandwich** beat **Dave Dimera** ... **Jay Flash** defeated **Nick Mirra** and **Alex Arcadian** in a three-way for the vacant Diamond division title.
(03-13-11)

—Johnny James

WISCONSIN

WEST ALLIS—NWA Midwest Brew City Wrestling at Knights of Columbus Hall: **Dave Rydell** beat **Justin Dredd** and **Jarod the Jackal** in a three-way ... **Beer City Bruisers** beat **Derek St. Holmes**, **Mason Quinn**, & **Jett Bennet** ... **Team Eh!** beat **Craig** & **Brandon Blaze** ... NWA Midwest heavyweight champion **Sadist** pinned **Chase McCoy**.
(03-18-11)

—Nic Jacobs

INTERNATIONAL

JAPAN

OKINAWA—New Japan at the Okinawa Prefectural Budokan: **Gedo** & **Jado** defeated **Hiromu Takahashi** & **Tiger Mask IV** ... **Tomohiro Ishii** pinned **King Fale** ... **Kaijin Habu Otoko**, **Kijimuna**, **Ryusuke Taguchi**, & **Shisaou** beat **Gurukun Diver**, **Jushin Thunder Liger**, **Menso-Re Oyaji**, & **Mil Mongoose** ... **Tetsuya Naito** & **Yujiro Takahashi** beat **Manabu Nakanishi** & **Tomoaki Honma** ... **Wataru Inoue** & **Yuji Nagata** defeated **Satoshi Kojima** & **Taichi** ... **Hiroshi Tanahashi**, **Hiroyoshi Tenzan**, & **Togi Makabe** beat **Shinsuke Nakamura**, **Takashi Iizuka**, & **Tau Yano**.
(03-25-11)

—Koichi Yoshizawa

PWI CLASSIC

FROM THE AUGUST 1986 ISSUE OF *INSIDE WRESTLING*

WRESTLEMANIA 2:

HULK HOGAN'S NIGHT OF REDEMPTION

Just as Hulk Hogan entered WrestleMania 2 with more than the WWF World title on the line, John Cena entered WM27 looking for much more than gold

FORGET ALL ABOUT Tommy "I Bleed Dodger Blue" Lasorda as a guest ring announcer. Forget all about Robert "Go Ahead, I Dare Ya, Knock The Battery Off My Shoulder" Conrad as a guest referee. Forget all about Ricky "Don't You Just Want To Vomit I'm So Cute" Schroder as a—well, just what was he supposed to be?

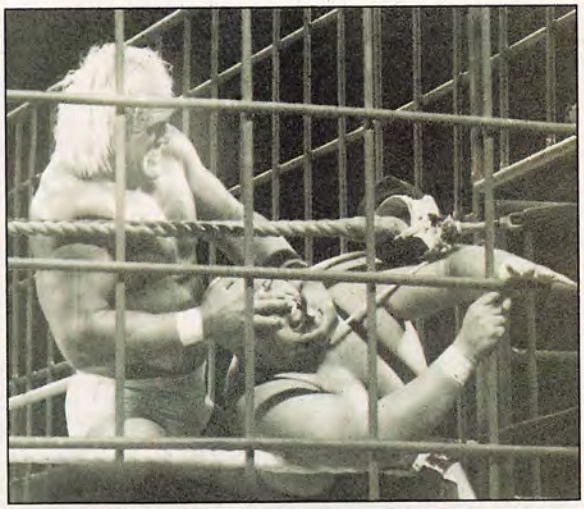
Forget all about them, all those celebrities who have absolutely no connection to or interest in professional wrestling. They're just there as added props to draw attention to the WWF's latest extravaganza of silliness and sport, assorted nuts in the Cracker Jack that was known as WrestleMania 2.

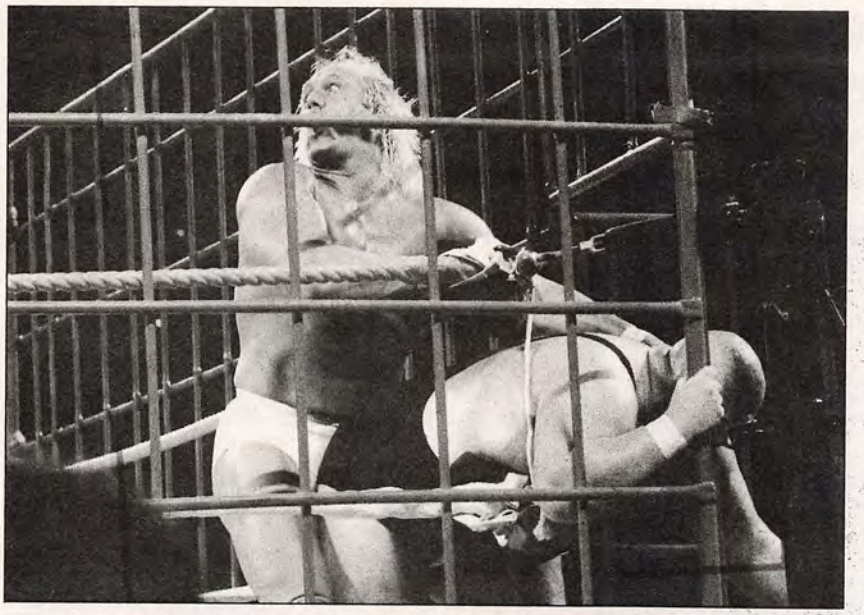
And while you're at it, forget the Cracker Jack. The fact of the matter is that this year's box of goodies contained two prizes: the match in which The British Bulldogs won the WWF World tag team title from Greg Valentine and Brutus Beefcake, and the WWF World title contest that saw Hulk Hogan successfully defend his belt in a steel cage against King Kong Bundy.

We'd like to address ourselves here to the latter of the two matches. Because while Hogan's title was on the line on April 7 in Los Angeles, the reality of WrestleMania 2 was that there was far more at stake than just the WWF World championship.

AT STAKE: Hogan's physical health, in doubt since February 15. That was the day Hogan, defending his title in Phoenix, Arizona, against Magnificent Muraco, sustained a serious rib injury in an attack from behind by King Kong Bundy and Bobby Heenan. Hogan was carried out on a stretcher that night, and grave doubts were raised about his well-being.

Two nights later in New York's Madison Square Garden, his ribs taped, Hogan went up against Randy Savage.



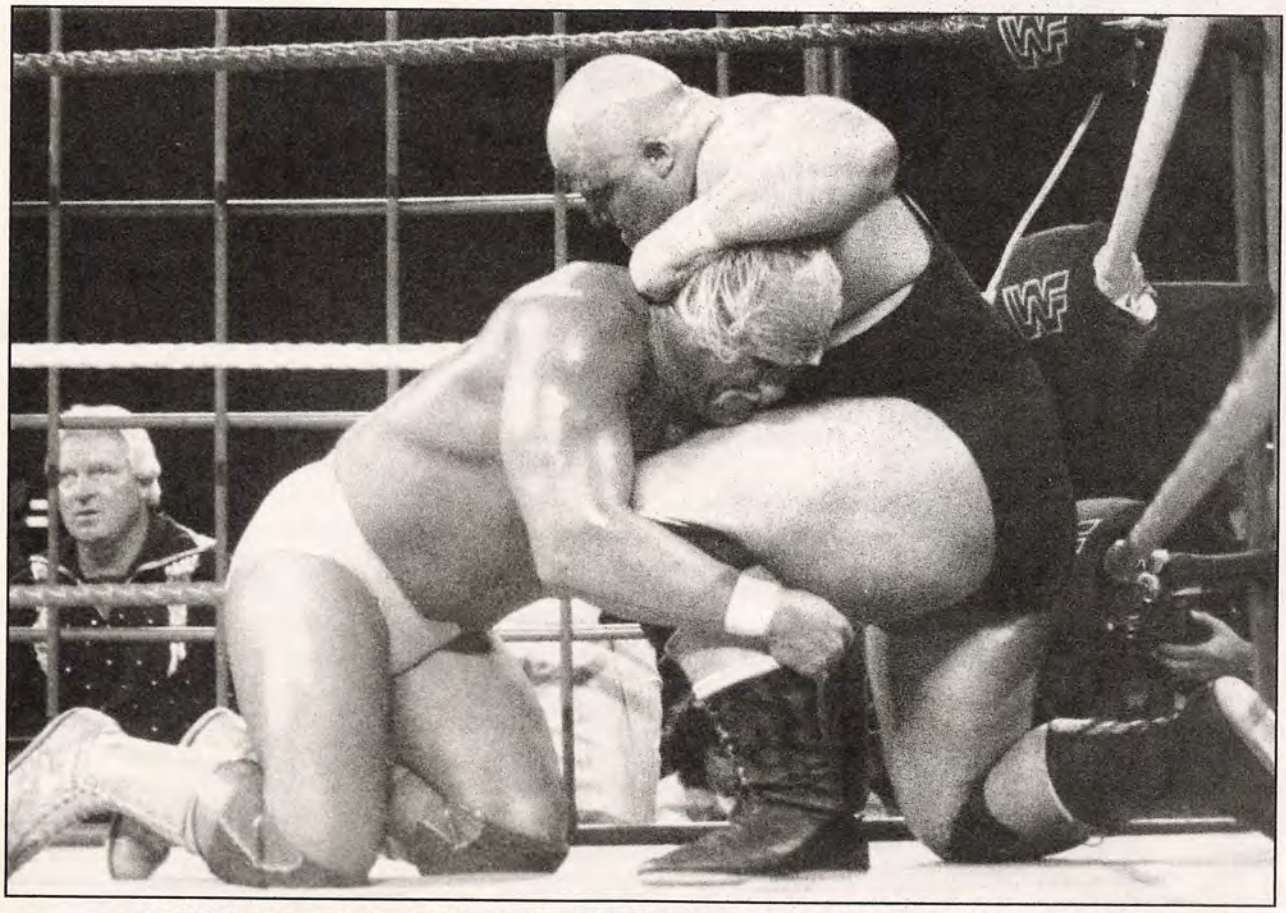


In the cage vs. Bundy, Hogan was able to bring his game to another level. He had to—much of the world was just waiting for him to fail.

And in the weeks that followed, Hogan continued to wrestle, but he also had continued to train extremely hard, working to build up the muscle around the short ribs where the injury had occurred. Hogan knew what most fans only suspected: A match with Bundy, particularly one where the pressures and the forces of a major event like WrestleMania 2 were at work, *particularly one held in a steel cage*, would test Hogan's physical abilities to their limits and beyond.

AT STAKE: Hogan's championship and reputation, under attack by critics ever since "The Hulkster" managed to transcend the sport of wrestling to become a national media celebrity. Hogan had appeared on television shows like *The Love Boat* and *The A-Team* and *The Tonight Show With Johnny Carson.* He had become a cartoon figure, and had grown into a merchandising franchise in and of himself. Was Hogan placing an obvious preference for Hollywood above his duties as WWF World champion?

Indeed, was it possible that Hogan just didn't want to wrestle? After all, Hogan had, over the past year or so, failed to defend his title in major arenas around the country. And in some of his title defenses, reports were coming back



At WM2, Hogan spent time battling not just Bundy, but also a rib injury dealt to him by Bundy and manager Bobby Heenan during "The Hulkster's" match against Magnificent Muraco.

INSIDE WRESTLING RATINGS

AUGUST 1986

WWF
1—Hulk Hogan
2—Randy Savage
3—Rick Steamboat
4—Magnificent Muraco
5—Tito Santana
6—King Kong Bundy
7—Jake Roberts
8—Junkyard Dog
9—Terry Funk
10—John Studd

NWA
1—Ric Flair
2—Magnum T.A.
3—Tully Blanchard
4—Rick Morton
5—Dusty Rhodes
6—Ronnie Garvin
7—Nikita Koloff
8—Hacksaw Duggan
9—Wahoo McDaniel
10—Lex Luger

AWA
1—Stan Hansen
2—Sgt. Slaughter
3—Nick Bockwinkel
4—Bruiser Brody
5—Larry Zbyszko
6—Rick Martel
7—Nord the Barbarian
8—Scott Hall
9—Boris Zukhov
10—Greg Gagne

TAG TEAMS
1—The Road Warriors
2—The British Bulldogs
3—The Midnight Express
4—Scott Hall & Curt Hennig
5—The Rock 'n' Roll Express
6—Greg Valentine & Brutus Beefcake
7—The Fantastics
8—The Fabulous Ones
9—Iron Sheik & Nikolai Koloff
10—Magnum T.A. & Dusty Rhodes

By fighting through adversity against Bundy, Hogan proved his championship mettle. After being insulted for weeks by The Rock heading into WrestleMania 27, John Cena was hoping to prove himself to WWE fans as well.

that Hogan was lethargic, that he wasn't determined enough, that he seemed bored. That the fans just weren't cheering as loud for Hulkamania anymore.

So when Lasorda and Conrad and Schroder got out of the way and the match began, the wrestling world sat back, ready to judge Hogan. The critics were prepared to pounce, ready to say that Hogan's body had faltered due to the Bundy injury in Phoenix, that his championship fire had been extinguished by the good life in the Hollywood fast lane, that his reputation as a champion was irreparable, and that the WWF title was therefore rendered a complete and total sham.

But that was not the case.

Hogan was magnificent, dispatching Bundy in all of 10 minutes and 12 seconds. He entered the ring in spectacular fashion, scaling the cage, just as he planned to do in reverse later on. Protecting his injured ribs were bandages, bandages that Bundy unwrapped early and used to his advantage by choking the champion. Bundy had Hogan in severe trouble. And when he threw Hogan into the corner and hurled his 446 pounds of Atlantic City Avalanche at his damaged ribs, the critics salivated. They saw a champion on a stretcher, grabbing his side and screaming in pain.

Hogan, however, had other ideas. The Avalanche's sole effect was to make Hogan angrier. The Hogan "look" sent cheers through the arena and fear down Bundy's spine. Bundy moved in to whip Hogan into the corner. Hogan reversed the whip, Bundy came back off the ropes, and the world stood still.

Fans look back at this moment in awe, and some who were there say it seemed to happen in slow motion, though it only took a fraction of a second: Hogan dropped one arm low, kept his other arm high. In one poetic, sweeping, grand motion, Hogan scooped

Bundy into the air and sent him crashing to the mat with a thunderous slam that elicited a standing ovation from the fans.

Hogan delivered a legdrop for good measure, then began to scale the cage. As he reached the top, Bundy grabbed a weak hold of one of his legs. Hogan kicked Bundy back to the mat, and climbed over the top.

As Hogan's feet touched the floor of the L.A. Sports Arena, the fans erupted in a deafening roar of support for the man who by many standards may be regarded as the greatest WWF champion ever.

Hogan had proven he was up to the challenge of WrestleMania 2, both physically and mentally. The title defense may well go down in history as his greatest ever. And perhaps, best of all, his critics had been silenced.

For the man who has worn the WWF World belt for over two years, the victory was sweet redemption. Very sweet, indeed. □

With so much at stake, it was remarkable that Hogan didn't lose sight of the task at hand—defeating Bundy. Cena freely admitted that The Rock had caused him to lose focus in the days leading up to 'Mania.

INSIDE WRESTLING, AUGUST 1986

The Cover: The cover on the August 1986 issue of *Inside Wrestling* featured Hulk Hogan and King Kong Bundy in the throes of battle at WrestleMania 2, where so much more than the WWF World title was on the line for "The Hulkster."

O Brother, Where Art Thou? When Jimmy Garvin returned to the Mid-Atlantic region, many thought he and brother Ronnie would pair up right away. Problem was, Jimmy returned with the stated goal of taking out Ronnie's good friend Wahoo McDaniel.

Strength In Numbers: Few wrestlers were as fearsome as Steve "Dr. Death" Williams—which was exactly why we couldn't understand his reluctance to compete in singles matches. Williams' tag team credentials were impeccable, but he was capable of so much more on his own.

Kangaroo Court: Somehow the ongoing friction between Sir Oliver Humperdink and The Fabulous Ones found its way to a courtroom, where Humperdink attempted to sue Steve Keirn and Stan Lane for breach of contract. Veteran scribe Matt Brock recalls the spectacle Humperdink put on inside the Halls of Justice, as well as his own role in the affair.

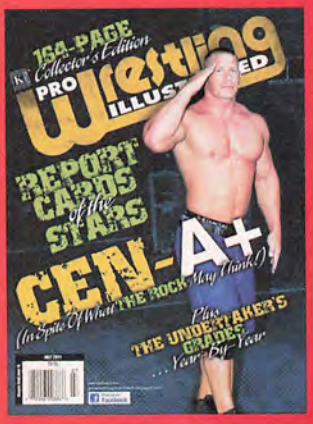
Editor's Notebook: Nikita Koloff's reaction (or lack thereof) to the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe that impacted his hometown of Kiev, Ukraine, seemed to personify the image of the unfeeling Soviet athlete during the Cold War. Would any current Japanese wrestler imitate Koloff when asked about the current earthquake/tsunami/nuclear emergency in Japan?

BETWEEN FALLS

PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns.

SEND LETTERS TO:
BETWEEN FALLS
Box 96, Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or you can e-mail your comments to
prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com

THE GRADES ARE IN



Each year when our Report Cards issue comes out, we hear from one or two wrestlers who are dissatisfied with their grades. This year, it was our readers who wasted no time jumping on us for the marks we issued to some of their favorite stars.

"Randy Orton gets a B?" wrote subscriber Lori Franks. "Nobody came close to Orton in the ring last year. Your grading criteria are quite questionable."

Reader Frank Orr says, "I agree that Alberto Del Rio shows much promise and potential, but I think he needs to accomplish just a little bit more in WWE before you give him an A."

At least one reader, Pat Hill, believes we were on the money with Samoa Joe's grade ... almost. "A C- is too high of a grade for Samoa Joe. For years, we saw just how good Joe could be, but over the past year, he was a complete non-factor in TNA. For all his ability and the little he does with it, I'd haven given Joe an F-" Ouch!

SHOW SOME RESPECT

Because *PWI* has stepped up its coverage of both tag team and women's wrestling in recent issues, I was surprised to see no mention of Sarita and Rosita winning the TNA Knockouts tag title from Angelina Love and Winter.

Maybe this doesn't mean much in the overall landscape of professional wrestling, but I think it is a positive development for TNA and the Knockouts division.

With their victory over Love and Winter, Sarita and Rosita have shown that the stranglehold The Beautiful People held on the Knockouts division could be broken. It also shows that women who wrestle a lucha libre-influenced style have a place in the national promotions. Come on, *PWI*! Give these women the respect and coverage they deserve!

DANIELLE WILLIAMS
Secaucus, NJ

TWO THUMBS UP!

Congratulations to Colt Cabana, who won the NWA heavyweight title from Adam Pearce in March. Colt is best know perhaps for his ROH work and his sort of ancillary interests, such as stand-up comedy and podcasting, but he is a very capable wrestler, as Pearce found out. Can't help but wonder if Adam underestimated him.

GREG MacDONALD
New York, NY

LOSING PATIENCE

I am a big-time WWE fan, but I am running out of patience with the way they're handling John Morrison. For months now, Morrison has been tout-

Photo by George Tahinos/TNA Wrestling

By defeating Angelina Love and Winter for the TNA Knockouts tag team championship, Sarita and Rosita did more than snag some gold, says reader Danielle Williams. They showed the wrestling world how diverse the Knockouts division can be.

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John Morrison's former tag team partner Miz has moved on to a main-event spot in WWE, that reader Joe Norris feels Morrison should be in. Joe says WWE fans are growing impatient for Morrison to assume a place atop the WWE card.

ed on Raw as this hungry young lion that's poised to become a main-eventer, yet he never seems to get to that level.

With his look and athletic ability, Morrison should not be stuck in mid-card feuds with wrestlers like Sheamus and Dolph Ziggler. He belongs in feature matches with Edge and John Cena. I just wish WWE would wake up and realize just how frustrated Morrison's fans are becoming.

JOE NORRIS
Boston, MA

MATT'S MISTAKE

As a TNA fan, I was hoping Matt Hardy would make a big splash when he arrived. When he took on Rob Van Dam at Genesis, I really thought good things were in store for him. Unfortunately, he chose to become another Immortal thug, and now he's just another name on the TNA roster.

I believe Matt is capable of achieving great things in TNA. I also believe he'll never achieve them if he continues to accept his role as a member of Immortal.

KARI FOCELLI
Jacksonville, FL

THE JERSEY BORE

Can somebody please explain professional wrestling's fascination with *The Jersey Shore* to me?

I understand it's a popular TV show and WWE and TNA want to capitalize off of what's hot in pop culture, but, really, who wants to see Snooki, Angelina, or J-Woww in a wrestling ring?

Enduring the obnoxious Robbie E and Cookie characters is grueling enough, now I have to suffer through the real actors, too? At least Robbie E and Cookie are trained wrestlers who know their way around a ring.

I may be in the minority, but I find *The Jersey Shore* cast members uninteresting, unlikable, and far from entertaining. I don't even watch them on their own show, why would I watch them on *Raw* or *Impact*?

Please, Vince McMahon and Dixie Carter, leave these no-talents hacks in Seaside Heights, New Jersey, where they belong.

DONNA MARESCA
Chicago, IL

FORGET SOMETHING?

In your June 2011 issue, I found an error in the records of all-time WrestleMania performers. Batista, 2-1? Sorry, I thought he lost to both The Undertaker and John Cena at WrestleMania. Even more noticeable: Where is Triple-H? Checked the H's, not there. Checked the T's, not there. Ooops!!!

ROBERT LESKI
Sonofafrog316@aol.com

(Editor's note: Right you are on both counts, Robert. No excuses from us. Sorry for the oversights.)

PWI OFFICIAL RATINGS

FOR PERIOD ENDED APRIL 15, 2011

TOP 10

1. **THE MIZ**
   231, Cleveland, OH
   (1) WWE heavyweight champion
2. **STING**
   255, Venice Beach, CA
   (-) TNA World champion
3. **ULTIMO GUERRERO**
   210, Gomez Palacio, Mex.
   (-) CMLL champion
4. **JOHN CENA**
   240, West Newbury, MA
   (-) No. 1 contender WWE title
5. **HIROSHI TANAHASHI**
   230, Ogaki, Japan
   (4) IWGP heavyweight champion
6. **ALBERTO DEL RIO**
   240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico
   (6) No. 1 contender WWE World title
7. **COLT CABANA**
   233, Chicago, IL
   (-) NWA heavyweight champion
8. **EDDIE EDWARDS**
   214, Boston, MA
   (-) Ring of Honor heavyweight champion
9. **EL ZORRO**
   200, Sevilla, Spain
   (9) AAA champion
10. **CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
    224, Los Angeles, CA
    (-) No. 1 contender ROH title

John Cena

TAG TEAMS

1. **ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM**
   Combined weight: 470 pounds
   (1) TNA World tag team champions
2. **CHARLIE HAAS & SHELTON BENJAMIN**
   Combined weight: 497 pounds
   (3) ROH tag team champions
3. **MASATO YOSHINO & PAC**
   Combined weight: 331 pounds
   (6) DGUSA Open the United Gate champions
4. **HEATH SLATER & JUSTIN GABRIEL**
   Combined weight: 457 pounds
   (-) WWE tag team champions
5. **CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI**
   Combined weight: 475 pounds
   (2) No. 1 contenders ROH tag team title
6. **RICHIE STEAMBOAT & SETH ROLLINS**
   Combined weight: 442 pounds
   (-) FCW tag team champions
7. **JOE DOERING & KONO**
   Combined weight: 526 pounds
   (-) AJPW Unified tag team Champions
8. **JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS**
   Combined weight: 449 pounds
   (7) NWA tag team champions
9. **KENNY OMEGA & KOTA IBUSHI**
   Combined weight: 390 pounds
   (9) IWGP junior heavyweight tag team champions
10. **JESSE NEAL & SHANNON MOORE**
    Combined weight: 433 pounds
    (-) No. 1 contenders TNA World tag team title

RAW

WWE Champion:
THE MIZ
(C) 231, Cleveland, Ohio

1—**JOHN CENA** *(2) 240, West Newberry, MA*
2—**SHEAMUS** *(7) 280, Dublin, Ireland*
3—**RANDY ORTON** *(1) 245, St. Louis, MO*
4—**CM PUNK** *(3) 222, Chicago, IL*
5—**DOLPH ZIGGLER** *(–) 221, Hollywood, CA*
6—**JOHN MORRISON** *(6) 223, Los Angeles, CA*
7—**DANIEL BRYAN** *(4) 190, Aberdeen, WA*
8—**SIN CARA** *(–) 196, Mexico City, Mexico*
9—**SANTINO MARELLA** *(9) 226, Calabria, Italy*
10—**R-TRUTH** *(10) 235, Charlotte, NC*

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
VACANT

1—**ALBERTO DEL RIO** *(1) 240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico*
2—**CHRISTIAN** *(–) 240, Toronto, ON*
3—**CODY RHODES** *(9) 223, Marietta, GA*
4—**REY MYSTERIO JR.** *(3) 175, San Diego, CA*
5—**THE BIG SHOW** *(6) 485, Tampa, FL*
6—**KOFI KINGSTON** *(7) 221, Ghana, West Africa*
7—**WADE BARRETT** *(4) 265, Manchester, England*
8—**KANE** *(5) 323, Hell*
9—**JACK SWAGGER** *(10) 263, Perry, OK*
10—**DREW McINTYRE** *(8) 252, Ayr, Scotland*

TNA

Champion:
STING
(–) 255, Venice Beach, CA

1—**MR. ANDERSON** *(1) 243, Green Bay, WI*
2—**ROB VAN DAM** *(4) 237, Los Angeles, CA*
3—**KURT ANGLE** *(5) 240, Pittsburgh, PA*
4—**JEFF JARRETT** *(6) 235, Nashville, TN*
5—**MATT MORGAN** *(2) 310, Fairfield, CT*
6—**KAZARIAN** *(7) 225, Anaheim, CA*
7—**HERNANDEZ** *(3) 280, Houston, TX*
8—**SAMOA JOE** *(10) 280, Los Angeles, CA*
9—**MATT HARDY** *(–) 236, Cameron, NC*
10—**GUNNER** *(–) 247, Paris Island, SC*

RING OF HONOR

World Champion:
EDDIE EDWARDS
(5) 214, Boston, MA

1—**CHRISTOPHER DANIELS** *(2) 224, Los Angeles, CA*
2—**DAVEY RICHARDS** *(1) 205, Othello, WA*
3—**RODERICK STRONG** *(C) 215, Tampa, FL*
4—**EL GENERICO** *(10) 180, Tijuana, Mexico*
5—**JAY BRISCOE** *(3) 215, Laurel, DE*
6—**HOMICIDE** *(4) 205, Brooklyn, NY*
7—**CHRIS HERO** *(9) 225, Metropolis*
8—**MARK BRISCOE** *(6) 215, Laurel, DE*
9—**CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI** *(7) 265, Lucerne, Switzerland*
10—**MIKE BENNETT** *(–) 225, Carver, MA*

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (–) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue, while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

ARENACHICKS: Champion—Vacant; **1**—Angel Orsini; **2**—Jazz; **3**—Sassy Stephie; **4**—Kellie Skater; **5**—Allison Danger; **6**—Sara Del Rey; **7**—Christie Ricci; **8**—April Hunter; **9**—Jessicka Havok; **10**—Mia Svenson.

DRAGON GATE USA: Champion—YAMATO; **1**—Masato Yoshino; **2**—Austin Aries; **3**—Akira Tozawa; **4**—BxB Hulk; **5**—Naruki Doi; **6**—Brodie Lee; **7**—Jon Moxley; **8**—CIMA; **9**—Ricochet; **10**—PAC.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—MEGA; **1**—Chris Wylde; **2**—Glen Osbourne; **3**—Aden Chambers; **4**—Scott Wright; **5**—Travis Blake; **6**—Bazooka Joe; **7**—Kid America; **8**—Jason Leigh; **9**—Courageous Cruz; **10**—Papadon.

EVOLVE: Champion—Vacant; **1**—Jimmy Jacobs; **2**—Johnny Gargano; **3**—Chuck Taylor; **4**—Drake Younger; **5**—Ricochet; **6**—Munenori Sawa; **7**—Sami Callihan; **8**—Chris Lee; **9**—Claudio Castagnoli; **10**—Homicide.

NORTHEAST WRESTLING: Champion—Matt Taven; **1**—Hale Collins; **2**—Matt Hardy; **3**—Jerry Lawler; **4**—Robbie E.; **5**—Eddie Edwards; **6**—Tommy Dreamer; **7**—Jeff Starr; **8**—Adam Cole; **9**—Sgt. Slaughter; **10**—Ryan McBride.

NWA TOP ROPE: Champion—Vacant, **1**—Arrick Andrews; **2**—Hammer Jack; **3**—Big Bully Douglas; **4**—Ox Harley; **5**—Psycho; **6**—Pappy; **7**—Lee Condrey; **8**—Lee Cross; **9**—Jared Crowe; **10**—Anthony Wayne.

OLD TIME WRESTLING: Champion—Craig Nash; **1**—Chris Bohren; **2**—I.M. Smarter; **3**—Brian Johnson; **4**—Luis Martinez; **5**—Adam Chandler; **6**—John Graber; **7**—Bazooka Joe; **8**—Rob Vegas; **9**—Brolly; **10**—Eddie Hawkins.

PLATINUM CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Shane Marx; **1**—Vordell Walker; **2**—Lee Roy; **3**—The Vandal; **4**—Mason; **5**—Grotesque; **6**—The Phantom; **7**—Chip Day; **8**—Thomas Johnson; **9**—Curry Kid; **10**—Davey Richards.

PWF NORTHEAST: Champion—Brandon Locke; **1**—Mike Bennett; **2**—Johnny Hayes; **3**—Ryan Bisbal; **4**—Triplelicious; **5**—Jason Blade; **6**—Dave Cole; **7**—Kristian Frost; **8**—John Poe; **9**—Vinny Marseglia; **10**—Branden Michael Thomas.

TRI-STATE WRESTLING ALIANCE: Champion—Breaker Morant; **1**—Bobby Shields; **2**—Josh Daniels; **3**—SHOCKWAVE the Robot; **4**—Tony Stetson; **5**—Matt Saigon; **6**—Blue Meanie; **7**—Chris Wylde; **8**—Damian Dragon; **9**—CUJO the Hellhound; **10**—Kid America.

TENNESSEE XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Bob 0 Mac; **1**—Nick Taylor; **2**—Bobby Blassie; **3**—Allen Shepard; **4**—Funkmaster V; **5**—Bobby Rayne; **6**—Shane Daniels; **7**—Tsunami Kid; **8**—J-Mac; **9**—Demetria; **10**—Maskerade.

WOMEN SUPERSTARS UNCENSORED: Champion—Mercedes Martinez; **1**—Brittney Savage; **2**—Jessicka Havok; **3**—Alicia; **4**—Nikki Roxx; **5**—Serena; **6**—Jazz; **7**—Sassy Stephanie; **8**—Rain; **9**—Kristin Astara; **10**—Jamilia Craft.

NWA

Champion:
COLT CABANA
(3) 233, Chicago, IL

1—THE SHEIK
(1) 242, Damascus, Syria
2—CHANCE PROPHET
(9) 225, Sacramento, CA
3—ADAM PEARCE
(C) 248, San Diego, CA
4—JOEY RYAN
(8) 210, Los Angeles, CA
5—DAMIEN WAYNE
(–) 237, Hampton, VA
6—AUSTIN ARIES
(–) 202, Milwaukee, WI
7—ANTONIO THOMAS
(6) 235, Panama City, FL
8—OLIVER JOHN
(7) 228, Sacramento, CA
9—ACE ROCKWELL
(–) 212, Atlanta, GA
10—BLUE DEMON JR.
(10) 194, Mexico City, Mexico

JAPAN

1—HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(1) 230, Ogaki, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion
2—TAKASHI SUGIURA
(3) 220, Nagoya, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
3—SUWAMA
(2) 260, Kanagawa, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion
4—YUJI NAGATA
(–) 238, Chiba, Japan
5—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(5) 190, Saitama, Japan
6—GO SHIOZAKI
(6) 240, Kumamoto, Japan
7—TOGI MAKABE
(7) 240, Sagamihara, Japan
8—SUZUKI KOTARO
(8) 180, Warabi, Japan
9—SHANE HASTE
(–) 205, Queensland, Australia
10—YOSHIHIRO TIJIRI
(10) 180, Kumamoto, Japan

MEXICO

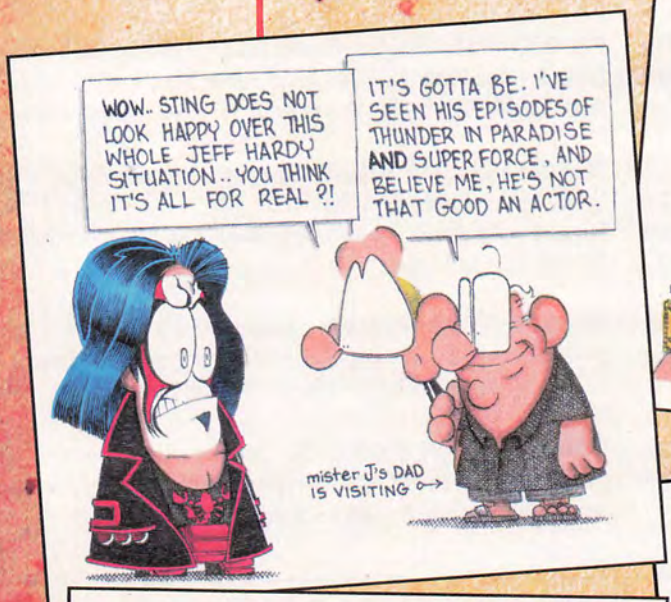
1—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(2) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mex.
CMLL champion
2—EL ZORRO
(1) 200, Sevilla, Spain
AAA champion
3—JUSHIN LIGER
(3) 210, Hiroshima, Japan
4—LA PARKA
(10) 220, Hermosillo, Mex.
5—NEGRO CASAS
(4) 170, Mexico City, Mex.
6—DR. WAGNER JR.
(–) 216, Torreon, Mex.
7—VOLADOR JR.
(6) 190, Monclova, Mex.
8—LA SOMBRA
(7) 180, Gomez Palacio, Mex.
9—AVERNO
(8) 170, Mexico City, Mex.
10—CHESSMAN
(9) 230, Villa Nicolas Romero, Mex.

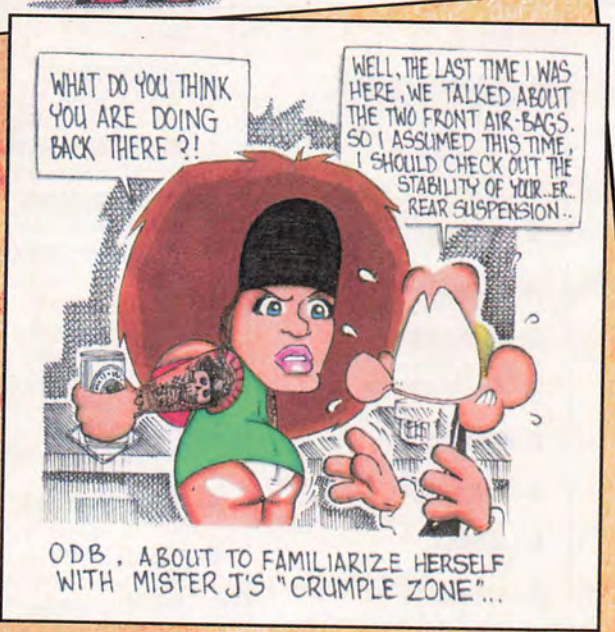
WOMEN

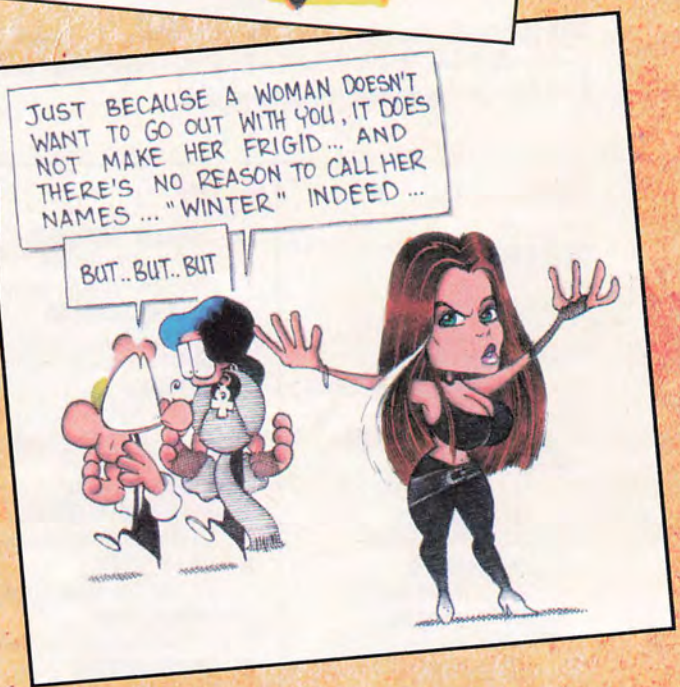
1—MADISON RAYNE
(2) 115, Seattle, WA
TNA Knockouts champion
2—MERCEDES MARTINEZ
(3) 147, Waterbury, CT
3—MADISON EAGLES
(6) 160, Sydney, Australia
4—MELISSA ANDERSON
(–) 142, San Francisco, CA
5—EVE TORRES
(1) 131, Los Angeles, CA
WWE Divas champion
6—BRITTANY FORCE
(8) 130, Johnstown, PA
7—TASHA SIMONE
(10) 156, The Darker Side of Evil
8—MICHELLE McCOOL
(–) 135, Palatka, FL
9—MICKIE JAMES
(4) 128, Richmond, VA
10—JESSICKA HAVOK
(–) 175, Canton, OH

DRAWING BLOOD

BY JASON CONLAN


WOW.. STING DOES NOT LOOK HAPPY OVER THIS WHOLE JEFF HARDY SITUATION.. YOU THINK IT'S ALL FOR REAL ?!
IT'S GOTTA BE. I'VE SEEN HIS EPISODES OF THUNDER IN PARADISE AND SUPER FORCE, AND BELIEVE ME, HE'S NOT THAT GOOD AN ACTOR.
mister J's DAD IS VISITING


WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING BACK THERE ?!
WELL, THE LAST TIME I WAS HERE, WE TALKED ABOUT THE TWO FRONT AIR-BAGS. SO I ASSUMED THIS TIME, I SHOULD CHECK OUT THE STABILITY OF YOUR..ER.. REAR SUSPENSION..
ODB, ABOUT TO FAMILIARIZE HERSELF WITH MISTER J'S "CRUMPLE ZONE"...


JUST BECAUSE A WOMAN DOESN'T WANT TO GO OUT WITH YOU, IT DOES NOT MAKE HER FRIGID... AND THERE'S NO REASON TO CALL HER NAMES ... "WINTER" INDEED ...
BUT..BUT..BUT

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